



The Place of Enchantment

British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern

ALEX OWEN

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And they said to one another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.
Come now therefore, and let us slay him.

GEN. 37:19-20

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Several of the chapters in the book began life as seminar and conference papers. I single out two very different occasions for special mention. The first is "The Victorian Supernatural," a conference held in 1995 at the University of North London, where I delivered the keynote address and encountered a new generation of scholars who were involved in serious work on occultism. It was at this exuberant and well-attended conference that it was really brought home to me that the Victorian occult had entered the mainstream of interdisciplinary Victorian studies. The second is the opportunity I was given in 1999 to air different aspects of the book's argument in the robust intellectual atmosphere of the Center for the Comparative Study of Social Transformations at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. My thanks to Geoff Eley for inviting me to participate as a Visiting Scholar in the center's theme of "Putting the Modern in Its Place," and to the many faculty who responded with such acuity and enthusiasm to my work. It was a memorable and hugely enjoyable occasion.

Different versions of chapter 6 benefited from scrutiny in colloquia and workshops at Harvard University, Northwestern University, Rutgers University, Princeton University, and the University of Chicago, and an article was subsequently published as "The Sorcerer and His Apprentice: Aleister Crowley and the Magical Exploration of Edwardian Subjectivity," *Journal of British Studies* 36 (1997): 99–133. Copyright © 1997 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. Selected material from chapters 4 and 5 was first presented in a paper delivered at the Institute for Historical Research,

London, in 1996; found final form in a paper for the Neale Colloquium in British History, University College, London, in 1998; and appeared as an essay in Martin Daunt and Bernhard Rieger, eds., *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

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INTRODUCTION

✧ Enchantment à la Mode ✧

In September 1898 two respectable Victorians met in a private house in London for the express purpose of traveling to the planets. One was an unmarried woman in her late thirties and of unimpeachable reputation, the other a conventional married businessman some three years her senior. They were friends but not amorously linked. Their intentions were focused and serious. On this occasion, the first of many such meetings, they had decided to visit Saturn. Recording the episode in meticulous detail, the woman, in key respects the more experienced of the two in such undertakings, noted that she and her companion facilitated the journey by using a particular colored symbol—a circle of indigo on a white background—and proceeded via the performance of precise rituals and the invocation of “names.” In her account the rituals are noted in abbreviated form, denoting common usage. The “names” go unrecorded, suggesting familiarity; it was unnecessary to state what would have been obvious to the participants or any others with whom the account might be shared. Accordingly, the chronicle is presented matter-of-factly; the events, although interesting and worthy of note, were apparently at some level unremarkable. We are told that the two journeyers passed together through a hexagram and into a ray of indigo and white, thence traveling ever upwards before finally perceiving before them the great dark world of Saturn. What happened on Saturn, whom they met, and what they learned is set down in detail. So, too, is the simple observation that, having discovered what they had come to learn, the so-journers returned to earth, suffering only minimal side effects from their trip. Three weeks later they were preparing to try Jupiter. Other planets were visited, as was the sun.

Who were these individuals, and what were they doing? What do such accounts mean? How are they to be deciphered? What is their significance?

Indeed, are they significant at all or do they represent merely the confused jottings of an oddly preoccupied pair? For although the reading public at the end of the nineteenth century was agog with tales of Mars, relatively few Victorians could have supposed that they might pursue the question of Martian life for themselves—as our Victorian couple subsequently did. Few could have expected to travel at will to any of the planets—if, indeed, that is what this lady and gentleman actually believed they were doing. On the other hand, although these kinds of accounts are not plentiful, similar events are recorded by different individuals in related documents. There are records of other travels, not necessarily to the planets but to unknown worlds beyond our own. The terms *Astral Travel* and *Astral Light* make their appearance. In certain cases, the record keepers were interested in investigating the complex cosmology detailed by the great Elizabethan magus John Dee. Elsewhere, an unfamiliar alphabet hints at arcane occult systems and the learning required to access them. These are seemingly not accounts of random efforts, nor are they the recorded exploits of the unlettered or faint-hearted. Great astral battles were fought, angels encountered, signs exchanged, and secrets imparted. Each is detailed succinctly. The accounts themselves are dated, coherent narratives redolent of self-discipline and order. Furthermore, the documents have survived. Someone has seen fit to keep them. They have been preserved, stored, passed down. Ultimately they have become part of an archive. Clearly they mean something.

The private papers that record in such assiduous detail a series of visits to the planets in 1898 are to be found today among a large, diverse collection of occult materials housed at the Warburg Institute of the University of London. The archive bears the name of Gerald Yorke, a twentieth-century collector with occult interests who became but one custodian of such materials. Some of the documents in his collection were carefully preserved for posterity by that same Victorian gentleman who had been so involved with planetary investigations. The planetary accounts themselves constitute part of a rare corpus of Magical Diaries and records dating from the late nineteenth century, some of them still in private hands, and bear witness to the activities of a group of self-proclaimed magicians operating in London and elsewhere. But who were these magicians, and what was the magic they purported to practice? Certainly our planetary travelers did not use their given, everyday names in their accounts, using instead their magical names or (even more divertingly) the initials thereof. To make things additionally difficult, obfuscation was standard practice in this kind of Victorian magical documentation. Secrecy was all. Nevertheless, the codes have been cracked and some of the magicians identified. In this case they were Frederick Leigh

Gardner, an otherwise unremarkable member of the Stock Exchange who worked in London's financial district, and Annie Horniman, the woman who was to play an important if underrated part in the revival of Irish theatre around the turn of the century and go on to own and manage the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester. These were educated people of means who were active in the world. And both were members of the secret, elite Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn—the hidden yet foremost Magical Order of the Victorian period remembered mainly for its most famous initiate, the Irish poet and playwright W. B. Yeats.

For more than a decade the Golden Dawn exerted a powerful influence on the lives of its most devoted adherents. Personages famous, infamous, and obscure circulated through its ranks. It attracted the imaginative and talented with links to the theatre and the arts, such as W. B. Yeats and the Ibsenite actress Florence Farr; appealed to painters, and those with aspirations to paint—among them the artist Henry Marriott Paget and the youthful Mina Bergson, sister of the celebrated philosopher Henri Bergson; drew writers such as Edith Bland, who wrote well-known books for children under the name of E. Nesbit. Aleister Crowley, an aspiring poet and wealthy young man when he joined the Order, sought initiation at the hands of the Golden Dawn's elect before branching out on his own account and finally gaining renown as a so-called "black" magician. Others were reputable doctors, lawyers, and heads of family firms—decent, solid men. Some were Freemasons. None opposed the admission of women to the Order, although some chafed beneath their authority. It was often women who became involved first, drawing in friends, brothers, and husbands, and going on to assume positions of prominence within the Order's structured hierarchy. Annie Horniman was one such senior woman; Florence Farr, another; Mina Bergson, a third. In fact, Mina Bergson, who was married to the Order's powerful "Chief," was the Golden Dawn's equivalent of a high priestess. At her husband's request she changed her name to the "Celtic" Moina, and within the Order Celtic sentiment ran high. W. B. Yeats managed briefly to recruit Maud Gonne, the Irish nationalist and woman he loved, and enrolled other friends from a similar Irish Protestant background as his own to help develop a strand of Celtic mysticism.

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, however, was primarily concerned with the arcana and techniques of a particular form of what is usually called ritual or ceremonial magic. Its founders and leaders looked for inspiration to a centuries-old Rosicrucian tradition with its roots in Judeo-Christian mysticism and the "Egyptian" esotericism of Hermes Trismegistus—hence the use of *Hermetic* in the Order's name. The Order's advanced

Victorian initiates were versed in a reworked version of Renaissance Hermeticism preoccupied with alchemy, concerned to control the invisible forces of nature, and inviting its adherents to unlock the secrets of the universe. Journeys to the planets, or (probably more properly) an investigation of what the planets signified, would have been undertaken in this spirit, but this kind of procedure was only one aspect of a glamorous magical repertoire that included divination, astrology, and the invocation of powerful spiritual forces. Occult knowledge gained through learning and direct experience was what the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn offered. The Order recruited through personal recommendation, but while all initiates underwent a systematic basic training, only the chosen few were schooled in the “higher” magical arts. Advanced magic, even within an Order as selective as the Golden Dawn, was a privilege, not a right. Magicians were hand-picked. Magic is all about power, and in the Golden Dawn the judicious exercise of this power was taken very seriously.

But if the clandestine Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was specific in its orientation, its members were not alone in their occult preoccupations. By the 1890s the terms *mysticism* and *mystical revival* were in general use to refer to one of the most remarked trends of the decade: the widespread emergence of a new esoteric spirituality and a proliferation of spiritual groups and identities that together constituted what contemporaries called the new “spiritual movement of the age.” Characteristic of this “spiritual movement” was an upsurge of interest in medieval and Renaissance Christian mysticism, heterodox inspirational neo-Christianity, and, most notably, a nondenominational—sometimes non-Christian—interest in “esoteric philosophy,” or occultism. These trends were acknowledged and given a cautious gloss of respectability in 1899 when William Ralph Inge gave a series of lectures at Oxford University that famously asserted the relevance of the pagan Greek Mysteries for Christian mysticism. A revival of interest in mysticism and mystery traditions of all kinds, however, abounded at the end of the century, and a variety of groups promised access to esoteric readings of the world’s sacred literatures and an unmediated experience of the divine. In this heightened spiritual atmosphere a series of notable conversions to Roman Catholicism occurred, but many of the most spiritually inclined no longer identified in any way with formal Christian observance. They turned instead to the heterodox spirituality of occultism, with its animistic sense of a living universe and broad range of teachings drawn from sources as diverse as those of mystical Christianity, the Hermetic traditions of the West, and the religions of the East.

Fin-de-siècle occultism attracted an educated, usually middle-class clien-

tele in search of answers to fundamental but nonetheless profound questions about the meaning of life and the spiritual dimensions of the universe. In certain respects the “new” occultism represented a somewhat elitist counterpoint to the hugely successful Victorian spiritualist movement that had preceded it. This new movement did not officially espouse the essentially democratic practice of spiritualist mediumship (although some occultists were spiritualists), preferring instead to emphasize the “higher” import of its arcane “Eastern” teachings and European occult pedigree. There was an implicit understanding that it was learning, rather than the less predictable mediumistic “gifts,” that underwrote the new spirituality. Certainly success in an occult group like the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn lay in disciplined study and application, attributes that accorded well with a middle-class ethos. In spite of the fact that a key occultist like Madame Blavatsky, whose Theosophical Society was in full swing, was neither middle-class nor British, these organizations had a distinctly bourgeois tone that smacked of the gentleman’s private club. Off-putting for some, it was precisely this rarefied air of “people like us” that so attracted a broad swath of the middle classes. There was a shared frame of social and often intellectual reference that had been missing in spiritualism, while earnest students were enthralled by the unfolding panorama of “lost” arcane traditions and the hidden wisdom of the ancients. As Victoria’s reign drew to a close, many looked to a reformulated spirituality as a vital precursor of the coming age. Thousands were drawn to the “new” occultism with its promise of enlightenment.

Today fin-de-siècle occultism and the tremendous sense of excitement that it generated at the dawn of the new century have been all but forgotten. Although occultists such as the formidable Annie Besant, Madame Blavatsky’s successor, built on the strength of the “spiritual movement of the age” to create an international Theosophical movement, and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn spawned magical societies around the globe, it is nonetheless the case that there was a certain amnesia in relation to the hugely popular occult movement of the turn of the century. Although some senior occultists were not subsequently coy about their involvement—in spite of the risk that their reminiscences might be trivialized or misunderstood—there was perhaps a more general reluctance to revisit the scene of youthful or outmoded enthusiasms. There were certainly leading contemporaries who were keen to put their occult dabblings behind them, and here the amnesia seems almost willful. Sigmund Freud, for example, along with others who saw the human mind as the new frontier of scientific discovery, was fascinated by occultism and psychical (or paranormal) research. In 1921 he received invitations to coedit three different periodicals concerned with

the study of the occult, and while he declined in each case, he wrote in one of his letters of refusal: "If I had my life to live over again I should devote myself to psychical research rather than to psychoanalysis." Freud apparently later forgot this admission of deep interest, but his personal involvement with occultism during the early years of the new century was real enough.¹ As we shall see, there was a close connection between occultism and innovative approaches to the study of the mind. Indeed, Victorian science itself was sometimes less divorced from occultism than its practitioners might care to admit.

Equally, although historians are certainly aware of the new "spiritual movement," it has received remarkably little scholarly attention, possibly because the very notion of mysticism and the occult seems to run counter to our conception of modern culture and the modern mind-set. H. Stuart Hughes was tempted to characterize what he called "the new attitude" of the 1890s as "neo-romanticism or neo-mysticism," but fought shy of ascribing such attitudes to his modern heroes.² Owen Chadwick's discussion of the European *mentalité* noted the late nineteenth-century revival of a "breath of spirit," but warned that this new "sense that the world holds mystery" easily eludes analysis or definition.³ More recently, and in the British context, José Harris has rightly detected an Edwardian "rising tide of interest in mystical religion."⁴ Nevertheless, there remains among historians little developed sense of what such an interest might represent or involve—and this in spite of the fact that the "rising tide" of a new spirituality in the years preceding the Great War is clearly evident and demonstrable. By the first decade of the twentieth century, occult organizations proliferated, a vibrant occult press was in operation, books and periodicals devoted to the topic were appearing in ever greater numbers, and ordinary people as well as the famous and lettered were involved with occultism in all its variations. Although magical societies like the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn often remained sequestered and hidden, people were talking and writing about the occult and participating with great enthusiasm in its vibrant culture. It is historians who are off-beam, ignoring or sidelining a phenomenon that was so obviously remarked upon and important at the time. We have been slow to take up the challenge of the prospect of modern enchantment.

The Place of Enchantment explores what has been disregarded, marginalized, or forgotten. It is concerned with the emergence towards the end of the nineteenth century of a widespread engagement with occultism, mysticism, and, quite literally, magic, and deals with the parameters and significance of this engagement. In the following pages we enter some dark places as well as those filled with light. The book details the little-known and extraordinary

exploits of magicians on the Astral planes, and the tensions that tore occult groups apart; the exploratory sex magic of Aleister Crowley, and the scandals that rocked the occult world; close encounters with science and philosophy, and the attempts to formulate a new rationality that could outstrip them; and the personal triumphs and tribulations of those who dedicated themselves to the magical arts. Centrally, however, the book addresses the question of why, in this quintessentially “modern” moment, late-Victorian and Edwardian women and men became absorbed by metaphysical quests, heterodox spiritual encounters, and occult experimentation, each of which seems to signal the desire for unorthodox numinous experience in a post-Darwinian age. The answers provided here have less to do with the search for religious alternatives, although that is certainly part of the story, than the relationship of occult pursuits to distinctively avant-garde themes and pre-occupations. In particular, *The Place of Enchantment* explores the links between occultism and a newly conceptualized subjectivity, that innovative sense of self that so often characterized those self-identified “we moderns” of the fin de siècle.⁵ It places occultism at the heart of contemporary debate about what H. Stuart Hughes referred to as “the problem of consciousness,”⁶ and the argument of the book is directed towards understanding occultism as integral to much that was most self-consciously new at the turn of the century.



The Place of Enchantment spans the period between 1880 and 1914, those crucial “hinge” years during which reference to “the modern” and “we moderns” took on a new and urgent meaning. These are the years in which Britain emerged as an identifiably modern nation, but the approach of “the modern era” was heralded with an optimism marked by anxiety. Rapid social and political change were accompanied by fears of cultural decay and imperial decline, and even the most committed “moderns” looked to the horizon with a degree of uncertainty. For reasons that this book sets out to explore, a particular kind of occultism flourished in this climate and constituted a significant cultural phenomenon right up to the outbreak of the First World War. It presents the apparent anomaly of a revised mode of an earlier European magical tradition and “Eastern” spirituality operating in a modern urbanized culture in the grip of change, and in dialogue with an interrogative mind-set that not only distinguished between magic and religion but increasingly consigned both to the realm of the irrational. For it is the case that a “new” occultism underpinned by a magical heritage emerged

around the time that religion and magic became accepted analytical categories and the subjects of intellectual inquiry in the developing fields of anthropology and the study of comparative religions.⁷ And, equally, that during the same period the assumed concordat between science and religion was irretrievably breaking down, with science increasingly staking its claim to sole possession of the high ground of rationality.

Nevertheless, those who dedicated themselves to the study of occultism and the magical arts referred to themselves as magicians without either apology or irony. For them magic represented the ultimate spiritual experience and provided much of occultism's glittering appeal. The magic that they practiced was part of an elite, scholarly tradition and bore only a passing resemblance to the folkloric traditions of a receding rural Britain. Indeed, these were often individuals who positioned themselves at the forefront of cultural change—regarding themselves as part of an enlightened vanguard for whom conventional religion no longer answered and who believed that social change requires its aesthetic and spiritual counterparts. If they were in revolt, it was partly against what they saw as the dead hand of traditional religious observance and the scientism and materialism of Victorian culture. The “new” occultism at the turn of the century muddies the contemporaneous picture formulated by James Frazer and the Victorian evolutionists of a straightforward magic-religion-science march of cultural evolution. It sought to mobilize a reworked notion of science in the name of the religion of the ancients, and represented a paradigmatic shift in which the universe and the place of humankind within it were rationalized but brought back into sharply spiritual focus. Magic in particular played to the idea that magical powers can be clearly demonstrated, and occultism in general allied itself with the idea of scientific validation. In the occult arena, however, science was conceived as the handmaid of wisdom, and rational inquiry was dedicated to purely spiritual ends. At the turn of the century, in an ambiguous climate characterized by the acceptance of the status of science but uneasiness at what its sway implied, this proved to be a winning formula.

The Place of Enchantment sets out to show the ways in which fin-de-siècle occultism not only addressed some of the central dilemmas of modernity but was itself constitutive or symptomatic of key elements of modern culture. It deals with significant but little-understood issues of cultural formation and at the same time advances an argument about the nature of “the modern.” The term *modern* has a long history and certainly was much in use throughout the nineteenth century, but towards the end of that century there was a growing sense that society was poised on the brink of a distinctively modern age. Late-Victorian occultists were among those who self-

consciously referred to themselves as modern, and these women and men were not unusual in feeling that they were living at the advent of new and exciting times. For them *modern* was largely an optimistic indication, a qualitative as well as a temporal designation. They embraced change while adhering to the kind of aesthetic vision of the modern world espoused by their own contemporary, the socialist William Morris. The cultural context out of which the modernity of fin-de-siècle occultism emerged was diverse, however, and owed as much to the *modernité* of Baudelaire or “the decadents” as it did a particular British socialist tradition or the rationalized components of modern Western society. There is no doubt, though, that occultism was integral to new ways of perceiving and experiencing the world that were intrinsic to advanced capitalist culture. The “new” occultism was itself a mode of experiencing the new, and as such is symptomatic of the kind of cultural modernity that so interested some European social theorists at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁸

The concept of modernity has become the focus of intense debate in recent years. Modernity has been variously conceived as a helpful periodizing device, a philosophical discourse, a descriptive account of massive and interrelated structural processes, a discrete set of social practices, and particular kinds of lived experience and their representation. For historians the idea of modernity at the very least implies periodization, and although ideas differ as to precise chronology it has conventionally been taken to indicate the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁹ This is the period that has come to be identified with “the project of Enlightenment,” in particular the confident assertion of the supremacy of human reason and associated liberation from religious superstition, the pursuit through science of control of the natural world, and a commitment to an ethic of equality and justice as reflected in a new juridical and political order.¹⁰ Equally it was during this historical period that such ideals and goals became integral to the structural organization of much of European society. The rapid development of industrialism and the related regulation of labor and the marketplace, the rise and consolidation of nation-states, the increased bureaucratization of governments and of social life, and the secularized culture that operates as counterpart to these processes are each key aspects of a familiar narrative of modernity.

On the whole historians have had little problem with this summation. The disagreements have invariably centered on questions of cause and effect, which themselves invite controversy over the extent to which modern developments have been anticipated in earlier periods. Perhaps most notably, arguments have raged over the vexed issue of the relationship of the social (loosely interpreted) to the economic. This might best be exemplified

by the Marxist versus the Weberian position, very crudely the materialist versus the idealist, a dialogue that has become refined over the years.¹¹ This dialogue has always been concerned with cultural formation, more specifically the processes through which ideas, beliefs, and values find expression in or come to define modern institutions. Within these and related debates, including those concerned with modernization, the place of religion in modern society has been a subject of controversy. Again, discussion has circulated around the vexed question of the causal status of religious belief, while work in the sociology of religion—with its roots in the various approaches of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim—has often concerned itself with the so-called secularization thesis.

The secularization thesis is exemplified by an approach to the issue of historical change that emphasizes the inevitability of religious decline. Over the past twenty years or so, historians and social theorists alike have chipped away at this idea, but however much the theory of secularization has been critiqued—and the notion of the secular itself differently defined—the concept of a rational secularized culture as a key signifier of modernity has remained a constant.¹² We remain committed to understanding the post-Enlightenment Western world partly in terms of the secularizing process, and the nineteenth century as a watershed in the transition to a modern secular society. Max Weber's use of *Entzauberung* or “disenchantment” to identify one of the major social and cultural indicators of modernity remains hugely influential.

Weber's famous remarks were made during the course of a speech delivered in 1917 when he famously stated that the “fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world.’” Weber's phrase “the disenchantment of the world,” probably borrowed from Schiller, was intended as an impartial commentary on the social realities of modern life. It was the culminating statement of an argument in which Weber suggested that a slowly evolving “process of intellectualization” in the Western world, an “intellectualist rationalization, created by science and by scientifically oriented technology,” had destroyed the “mysterious incalculable forces” of earlier times. Instead of “mysterious powers,” and the “magical means” by which to control or influence them, moderns believe that all things might be mastered through rational calculation and technological application. According to Weber, gods and spirits had faded before the divining rod of the rationalizing human intellect. Modernity spelled the end of the possibility of “living in union with the divine,” and as Weber suggested elsewhere, this implies an ambiguous freedom. More particularly, a modern rational perspective characterized by

lack of belief in the external forces of the supernatural makes it impossible to invest the world with certain kinds of meaning—both in terms of existential existence and the unifying ethical values traditionally established by the great world religions. This, to paraphrase Weber, is what disenchantment means.¹³

Over twenty years ago, however, Owen Chadwick cautioned that we should “beware of the word *Entzauberung*,” or disenchantment.¹⁴ *The Place of Enchantment* presents just such a cautionary argument. While the book in no way seeks to dissociate itself from the relevance of a secularization paradigm for the modern period, it is intended as a contribution to a revisionist history of religion that questions the inevitability of religious decline and is cognizant of diversity and change in the realm of human spirituality. More particularly, the book’s argument represents an adjustment to the Weberian idea that modern “intellectual rationalization” and its concomitant institutionalization spelled the inevitable end of “living in union with the divine.” The kind of occultism detailed in the following pages involved a modern reworking of the idea of “mysterious powers,” one that refused the idea of the supernatural or necessarily “mysterious” while at the same time retaining the concept and experience of the numinous. The return to Renaissance magic was an attempt to rationalize and control the “mysterious incalculable forces” of old while building a sure and manifest bridge to “union with the divine.” This endeavor suggests that if religion no longer operated at the heart of the social fabric in the way that it once had in Britain, belief itself was capable of renegotiating the rationalism and even scientism of the period without sacrificing the ultimate claims to meaning that surely lie at the heart of religious experience. In other words, the “new” occultism was one manifestation of a secularizing process that spells neither the inevitable decline nor the irreconcilable loss of significant religious beliefs and behaviors in a modern age. What it does indicate is the way in which the search for spiritual meaning can renew itself and adapt to the changing climate of a secularizing culture.

That there was nonetheless something akin to a Victorian “crisis of faith” seems incontrovertible. Its impact has been reassessed and its contours softened by historians over the last two or three decades, but it remains the case that after the midcentury religious doubt quite simply became a feature of life as never before.¹⁵ It is notoriously difficult, of course, to gauge religious belief, and dangerous to associate faith too closely with formal religious observance; but certainly by the last years of the nineteenth century there was a perceptible sense that the Christian religion had entered a state of crisis. For some—and not simply those tortured and vocal Victorian men of letters—it was no longer possible to accept the existence of God in any shape

or form. And while this did not necessarily constitute the dramatic personal crisis recounted so movingly by a handful of leading contemporaries, it did register as a recent and notable cultural phenomenon among the educated classes.

On the other hand, middle-class anxieties about falling church attendance and the failure of religion to meet the challenges of modern life are offset by the appearance of different forms of religious evangelism during the second half of the century, and the fact that not all denominations (most notably the Unitarians) were adversely affected by a perceived turning of the religious tide. At the very least, that religious issues featured on such a large scale in public discourse suggests that religion still mattered in late-Victorian Britain. More to the point, the new “spiritual movement” of which occultism was such a salient part was itself indicative of the continued relevance of spirituality for many thousands of people. The “new” occultism, however, was attractive partly because it offered a spiritual alternative to religious orthodoxy, but one that ostensibly operated without the requirement of faith. A skeptical climate and the declining attractions of Christian orthodoxy undoubtedly contributed to the formulation and appeal of the occult, and in this it can be viewed as both a manifestation of and response to—if not a crisis—the reconfiguration of faith at the turn of the century.

Clearly, then, the “new” occultism is part of a narrative of changing religious sensibilities in Britain. But *The Place of Enchantment* is less concerned with religious issues per se than with the broader purchase of enchantment (in its Weberian sense) and its relation to modern culture. The evocative term *enchantment* neatly captures the sense of the magical, the numinous, and a state of mind seemingly at odds with the modern outlook. This book, however, explains the constitution and emergence of the new “spiritual movement” in terms of its close alignment with some of the most important intellectual currents and concerns of the day. Furthermore, it argues that the occultism that underwrote this movement was intrinsic to a contemporary shift in ideas about what might constitute belief and unbelief or mark the limits of the sacred and profane. The juxtaposition of “occultism” and the “culture of the modern” in the book’s subtitle signals a challenge both to our traditional understanding of modern culture as characterized by a strictly secular-scientific outlook, and of occultism as necessarily opposed to the dictates of rationalism and out of synch with reality. The notion of “enchantment” conjures the domain that has increasingly been construed in the modern period as “the irrational,” but fin-de-siècle enchantment was committed to the guiding principle of reason and played to a formalized concept of rationality even as it contested a strictly secular rationalism.

The new “spiritual movement” and its concomitant enchanted worldview represented a profoundly spiritual impulse that ran counter to the rationales of Victorian positivism, but it was equally caught up in refashioning spirituality in ways that were distinctly modern. The “new” occultism in particular co-opted the language of science and staked a strong claim to rationality while at the same time undermining scientific naturalism as a worldview and rejecting the rationalist assumptions upon which it depended. The appeal of occultism throughout the first decade of the new century (and, in different manifestations, beyond) indicates that there has been no straightforwardly triumphal march of scientific rationalism in the modern period. Not only do we now recognize that science itself was never thoroughly secularized in turn-of-the-century Britain, we must also accept that a significant constituency of modern-minded women and men were engaged in a dialogue with spirituality that involved the recuperation of modes of thought that rationalism dismisses as irrational. At the very least this invites us to rethink formulaic definitions of post-Enlightenment modernity that assume the unambiguous meaning of secularization and attendant status of rationalism in the modern period.

The Place of Enchantment, however, goes further in its investigation of a recuperated irrational than a discussion of a relationship between rationalism and religion allows. It locates the “new” occultism in relation to major secular developments in the understanding of mind and consciousness, developments that were themselves positing a dynamic relationship between the rational and irrational. In the discussion that follows, the occult, and in particular magic, is placed at the heart of a contemporary preoccupation with the riddle of human identity and consciousness as manifested in competing ideas of the self. For, true to its Hermetic pedigree, fin-de-siècle magic laid great stress on the importance of self-knowledge. The long backward glance towards the psychologized magic of the Renaissance magi provided the momentum for a “new” forward-looking Victorian spirituality that privileged the elaboration and full comprehension of self. Different aspects of this elaboration, and the alternative experience of reality it afforded, are detailed over the course of several chapters, in which I argue that advanced magical practice was deeply implicated in emerging secular ideas about the personal “irrational.” Together these chapters explicate occultism in terms of a new spirituality that was intrinsically bound up with the self-conscious exploration of personal interiority and the modern drive towards self-realization. Perhaps more than anything else the argument is directed towards understanding the subjectivity assumed by the “new” occultism as both a requirement for and effect of the brave new world of modern existence.

As such, the formulation of occult subjectivity was inseparable from the instrumental rationality that Weber argued is intrinsic to the complex social processes of a modern order. In particular, and in common with all magical traditions, fin-de-siècle occultism was characterized by the will to both know and control the natural world. It taught that complete mastery of a complex magical arcana together with total self-mastery and an indomitable will are the foremost prerequisites for magical Adeptship. Self-mastery, self-assertion, and the control of nature are familiar features of a bourgeois individualism usually associated with the nineteenth century, but the “new” occultism emerged at a time of growing uneasiness over what many perceived as the loss of personal integrity and authority in the face of an homogenizing mass society. In this respect fin-de-siècle occultism perhaps had something in common with the containment of anxiety and a defensive self-against-society stance that sociological and anthropological studies sometimes associate with magic. But the kind of ceremonial magic practiced at the fin de siècle was predicated on the acknowledgment and display of unlimited personal powers as well as the belief that magical operations have tangible social consequences. Magic often attracted the socially committed and, while political affiliations varied across a wide spectrum, magical operations were invariably seen as the spiritualized complement of activity in the social realm rather than an alternative to it. Certainly magic assumed a high degree of personal efficacy and represented a considerable investment in ideals of social and spiritual progress. Indeed, a commitment to the Victorian notion of progress underwrote the entire occult enterprise. Social and individual transformation are the watchwords of a fin-de-siècle spirituality that regarded the final decade of the old century as a harbinger of a truly enlightened new order.

If “fin de siècle” is the phrase most often used to refer to the turn of the century, it is clear that for many late-Victorians it signified a beginning as much as an end. Furthermore, because “fin de siècle” was often used synonymously with *modern* and *new*, it also captured a particular cast of mind—a new consciousness of what it means to be modern. At the end of the 1890s, however, at the advent of the much-anticipated “new age,” it seemed that to be modern might involve living in times that were fraught with new tensions. Contemporaries observed that the newly enfranchised (male) nation was characterized by unrivaled political, class, and gender antagonisms, while the emergence of new gender and sexual identities seemed to challenge conventional understandings of *man* and *woman*. At the same time, many feared that science was striving to secure its intellectual ascendancy at the expense of religion and that a religious understanding of self was under attack from

new areas of professional specialization. It was in this atmosphere that an occultism appeared which—far from representing or orchestrating a retreat from the fray—was itself intrinsic to the cultural maneuvers of a society in transition.

The Place of Enchantment is directly concerned with this phenomenon. Its leading contention is that occultism cannot be written off as a retrogressive throwback or fringe aberration, a reworked “shadow of the Enlightenment,” but instead must be understood as integral to the shaping of the new at the turn of the century. In broad terms the book makes an argument for the centrality of a newly configured enchantment in the modern period, and invites us to rethink the ways in which “the modern” has traditionally been conceived. In the following pages I pursue this theme through a set of related chapters exploring different dimensions of the argument. I focus on situating the new “spiritual movement” at the heart of distinctively modern and often secular preoccupations, and the narrative ranges across a spectrum of domains and scholarly concerns even as the book itself develops a carefully located and unified argument. The discussion moves back and forth between an elaboration and explication of occultism and its social and cultural context, close readings of constituent moments, and an engagement with histories of ideas and a paradigmatic theoretical literature. Interwoven throughout are the sometimes startling life stories and gripping adventures of the occultists themselves. I therefore employ different narrative strategies at particular junctures in order to do justice to the lived experience of these women and men while exploring both the hermeneutics of occultism and its wider cultural resonances. There are, in other words, narrative shifts that accompany the move into different kinds of historical material and argument.

The ultimate purpose of the book is to locate the emergence of a new kind of spirituality at the fin de siècle within the context of a broader discussion about the meanings of “the modern.” As such, it neither seeks nor claims to be anything approaching an exhaustive history of the occult in this period. Its scope is specific. The book proposes the rehabilitation of a “forgotten” or misrepresented cultural phenomenon, and in so doing takes us deep into the occult world; but it is less concerned with a detailed mapping of occult terrain than with what we might call the ends of occultism. It interrogates the occult—with its signifying practices, knowledge claims, and carefully formulated subjectivity—in order to explain and situate it in cultural terms. And here, along with more traditional notions of aesthetics, intellectual ideas, and moral judgments, culture is assumed to include those dimensions of life having to do with perception, psychic formation, and the

creation of reality itself. The book is primarily directed towards arguing that occultism was constitutive of modern culture at the fin de siècle; conversely, it seeks to trace the lineaments of “the modern” in the gestures and presumptions of the occult. Most specifically, then, *The Place of Enchantment* sets out to show that this new form of occult spirituality was a particular articulation of the diverse and often ambiguous processes through which cultural modernity was constituted in Britain during the crucial years prior to the outbreak of the First World War.

CHAPTER ONE

Culture and the Occult at the Fin de Siècle

When Holbrook Jackson published his classic account of fin-de-siècle art and ideas in 1913, he looked back to the exhilarating decade of the 1890s—with its inescapable sense of intense social and cultural change, its literary “decadence,” and its proliferation of new religious movements—as the quintessential moment in the generation of a truly new age. Jackson, who moved in the heady circles of early twentieth-century intellectual and literary London, stressed the sense of excitement and exhilaration with which the 1890s began.¹ He pointed to the swirl of experimental ideas, the incarnation of “a thousand ‘movements,’” and the certainty that the 1890s marked a transition “not only from one social system to another, but from one morality to another, from one culture to another, and from one religion to a dozen or none!” Jackson thought of the 1890s as a visionary decade, and argued that one of its three defining characteristics was “the development of a Transcendental View of Social Life.” In particular, he drew attention to the 1890s as the years during which “the beginning of the revival of mysticism” got under way.² This was a revival that was to continue well into the early years of the new century, and Jackson’s view was amplified by others writing during the same period. Just before the outbreak of war in 1914, those with a finger on the cultural pulse of the nation acknowledged that a general “spiritual renaissance” and “mystical revival” were part of the general milieu and a mark of the times.³ And by the end of the war mysticism had “become a household word.”⁴

The “mystical revival” that observers and participants alike associated with the fin de siècle did not, however, emerge in a vacuum. Earlier manifestations of heterodox spirituality had made their mark during the first half of the century, and the Victorians had long been fascinated by a wide range of phenomena that might loosely be termed occult.⁵ As George Bernard Shaw

remarked, the later Victorians were “addicted to table-rapping, materialization séances, clairvoyance, palmistry, crystal-gazing and the like,” just as their parents had been fascinated by phrenology and mesmerism.⁶ Phrenology and mesmerism, neither of which were strictly concerned with the occult, provided in different ways an overture to the huge explosion of interest in spiritualism after the midcentury—partly because they offered a naturalizing explanation for the ephemera of personality and altered mental states.⁷ Mesmerism in particular provided some of the terminology and categories of thought later adopted by spiritualists, and introduced the Victorian public to the concept of an unseen universal fluid or force that could be manipulated at will. Significantly, mesmerism also popularized the idea of the mesmeric séance and its leitmotif, the induced trance state, and many who had been enthusiasts of mesmerism during the 1830s and 1840s were subsequently drawn towards spiritualism. Modern spiritualism arrived in England from its birthplace in the United States in the early 1850s and during the next twenty years took the country by storm. Like mesmerism, spiritualism held huge appeal for women and men of all classes and shades of belief, and similarly eschewed supernatural explanation. Spiritualists explained spirit communication and phenomena by proposing a hitherto undiscovered form of rarified matter that allowed spirits to manifest on the wordly plane. But for many of the thousands of Victorians who got caught up in the spiritualist craze, explanation was of secondary importance. They went wild for tables that jumped and cavorted as spirits made their presence known and obligingly ran through the repertoire associated with a first-rate séance. By the time spiritualism reached its Victorian heyday in the 1870s there can hardly have been a household in the land that had not been touched in some way by the spiritualist fever.⁸

Spiritualism prided itself on its democratic appeal and practice, emphasizing that a talent for communicating with the spirits was the prerogative of all. It was also extremely catholic in its attitude towards conventional religious belief. Many spiritualists were practicing Christians who saw in spiritualism direct confirmation of their beliefs. Others were disillusioned with what they considered the dead hand of orthodox dogma and ritual but regarded the spiritualist séance as a religious gathering in the tradition of the early primitive church, with its prophesying and speaking in tongues. Still others eschewed all orthodoxy, and of these some were secularists and free-thinkers while a small number favored the visionary path of forerunners such as the eighteenth-century Swedish seer Emanuel Swedenborg. Spiritualism had such broad appeal in part because it based its claims on common-sense criteria and the proof provided by the manifest existence of the spirits

themselves. It did not require faith in any orthodox sense but equally did nothing to injure the concept of divine intervention. At the same time, it provided the tremendous consolation of contact with dead loved ones and a comforting window into the timeless joys of the spiritual Summerland that beckoned beyond the grave. These were tantalizing inducements during a period in which death remained a feared and frequent visitor to families high and low, and the voice of religious doubt began to infiltrate even the most pious of homes. Quite apart from these important considerations, though, spiritualism offered the thrills and excitement of a theatrical entertainment in which suspense, pathos, and delight each played a part. Within the confines of the family, young and old alike were capable of displaying startling powers of mediumship and could treat the living members to an array of different spirit phenomena. In the public arena a generation of pretty young women became the darlings of the spiritualist circuit and wowed audiences of sitters with riveting displays of materialized spirits complete with costume, voice, and message.⁹ The most famous mediums traveled extensively in Europe, and of these Daniel Dunglas Home, probably the best-known medium of his day, gave séances for Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie, Queen Sophia of Holland, and Tsar Alexander II and his family.¹⁰ Many others visited less exalted but equally enthusiastic European spiritualist groups, and there was a constant interchange of mediums between Britain and America.¹¹

Spiritualism was a vitally important component of what has subsequently come to be called the nineteenth-century occult revival, a broad pan-European and American movement loosely dedicated to a variety of unorthodox spiritual beliefs that can loosely be termed occult. The term *occult*, however, encompasses such a broad spectrum of beliefs, ideas, and practices that it defies precise definition. It is often applied without qualification to activities as diverse as divination (astrology, palmistry, tarot reading, crystal gazing, and so on), sorcery, and black magic (the manipulation of natural forces, often for self-interested purposes), and various kinds of necromancy or spiritualist-related practices. This diversity is underpinned, however, by an implicit acceptance of the idea that reality as we are taught to understand it accounts for only a fraction of the ultimate reality which lies just beyond our immediate senses. It is this hidden reality that the psychic, medium, or magician claims to access, and serious occultists invariably conceive of their endeavors as the study and exploration of an occluded spiritual real. Nineteenth-century occultism was cast in this mold. Although many late-century occultists distanced themselves from spiritualism, dismissing it as vulgar, naïve, and overly concerned with spirit “phenomena,” it

nevertheless prepared the ground for subsequent occult developments. In particular, occultism taught the theory (and sometimes practice) of developing “powers that are latent in everyone—and are capable of being developed by those who give themselves to appropriate studies,” as well as “certain fundamental theories of the constitution of man and the universe”:¹²

Occultism is not merely an isolated discovery showing humanity to be possessed of certain powers over Nature, which the narrower study of Nature from the merely materialistic standpoint has failed to develop; it is an illumination cast over all previous spiritual speculation worth anything, of a kind which knits together some apparently divergent systems.¹³

Occultism therefore involved an understanding of “the constitution of man” as well as an intellectual engagement with occult metaphysics and practical knowledge of spiritual cosmology. Indeed, in some of its variations, occultism taught the Adept how to both examine and control “the more obscure processes of nature,” and enter into conversation with unseen spiritual realms. In spite of the many differences between spiritualism and fin-de-siècle occultism, a shared belief in the realities and relevance of the spirit world remained a constant.

As Holbrook Jackson’s telling phrase “revival of mysticism” makes clear, however, contemporaries regarded the spiritual developments at the end of the century as quite distinct from recent precursors. *Revival* clearly referred to something other than the spiritualism that had been so popular since the midcentury, and spiritualism itself had never been characterized as mystical. On the contrary, spiritualists held fast to their positivist claims even as they raised their standard against what they saw as the crude materialism of the age. Equally, most hostile critics (particularly scientific and medical men) regarded spiritualism as the province of knaves and fools rather than a popular movement with strong religious claims. In this most obvious sense the later movement represented something quite different. The term *mystical revival* was used across the ideological board to identify a range of spiritual alternatives to religious orthodoxy that sprang up in the 1880s and 1890s and gained momentum and prominence as the old century gave way to the new. In particular, the phenomenon to which much contemporary commentary was directed was a distinctively “esoteric” turn in matters religious. Edward Maitland, who was deeply involved in what he referred to as “the spiritual movement of the age,” noted that the two phrases with which the new spirituality of the 1890s was most closely associated were “the restoration of the

esoteric philosophy” and “the revival of mysticism.”¹⁴ And it was no will-o’-the-wisp. The sense of a sea change in the spiritual life of the nation was pervasive and enduring.

What lay behind this “spiritual movement” often had little to do with conventional Christian observance. The fin de siècle saw an upsurge of interest in elements that had all but disappeared from Christian orthodoxy and the development of an appetite for spiritual paths that were decidedly non-Christian. The new “spiritual movement” looked instead to medieval and Renaissance Christian mysticism, heterodox inspirational neo-Christianity, and Eastern religions. Similarly, a revival of interest in mystery traditions of all kinds abounded and went hand in hand with an exuberant paganism and renewed interest in a Western magical tradition. A wide variety of different groups promised select adherents access to esoteric readings of sacred texts that would illuminate the secret meanings which lay hidden at the heart of the world’s religious literatures. Some groups promoted an unmediated experience of the divine. Much of this found its way into a nondenominational (often non-Christian) “esoteric philosophy” or occultism that often incorporated elements of each of these practices. The effect was to blur the distinction between what was occult and what was not, a trend perhaps most clearly illustrated in orthodox terms by William Ralph Inge’s famous lectures at Oxford in 1899. In these lectures, fondly known as “Inge’s Bampton,” Inge (later to be appointed dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral) spoke of the connections between Christian mysticism and the pagan Greek mysteries while stoutly claiming exemption from the vagaries of Neoplatonism. Some Christian occultists spoke in almost identical terms of the interconnectedness of paganism and Christianity, with the significant difference that they did not feel the need to distance themselves from Neoplatonism. Above all, the “mystical revival” was rampantly eclectic. It drew on a wide array of spiritual traditions and practices, and some of the groups clustered under its umbrella operated in competition with (if not outright hostility to) each other.

What united many of these different trends and factions was a loosely Neoplatonic belief in an occluded spirit realm and a broadly conceived sense of an animistic universe in which all of creation is interrelated and part and expression of a universal soul or cosmic mind. These ideas, together with a belief in the essential unity of matter and spirit and, similarly, a correspondence between things earthly and spiritual, are central to much occult thought, and they were what gave the “mystical revival” its strongly occult flavor.

Given that, however, those most closely involved with the new spirituality

recognized that, while *occultism* and *mysticism* were often used synonymously, there were in fact distinct and important differences. Occultism was generally understood to refer to the study of (or search for) a hidden or veiled reality and the arcane secrets of existence. Mysticism, on the other hand, applied more specifically to an immediate experience of and oneness with a variously conceived divinity, an experience that could be received as a divine gift regardless of training or preparation. In practice, however, the different strands of occultism and mysticism were so closely interwoven that even those who were familiar with the finer points of esotericism used the terms interchangeably. Occultists themselves accepted that, while occultism and mysticism might be dedicated to very different ends, they often sought in their various practices a mystical union with the “occult” cosmic mind or soul. It was generally understood by serious adherents and popularizers alike, if less so by general commentators, that “mysticism” was simply another way of saying “occultism,” and that the “mystical revival” was in fact a reference to a complex amalgam of religious ideas and spiritual practices with more than a nodding acquaintance with the occult tradition.¹⁵

This was borne out by two of the key characteristics of the “mystical revival.” The new “spiritual movement” emphasized a move towards subtle and complex metaphysical teachings and placed explicit emphasis on a secret spiritual tradition that could be accessed only by an initiated elite. In both respects this marked a distinct break with spiritualism, which prided itself on its straightforward message and nonelitist practice. The suggestion that there is a hidden body of revelatory knowledge, part of a secret tradition that has been preserved and transmitted over the ages by an enlightened illuminati, was central to the most influential elements of the “mystical revival”—perhaps most notably Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky’s “Theosophy.” It is what marked groups like the Theosophical Society as “occult” in the most precise meaning of the term, and it constituted much of their glittering appeal. Ordinary women and men were being offered the chance to join the enlightened but influential few by becoming members of a select group given over to metaphysical inquiry and the pursuit of esoteric knowledge. The promise and appeal of these groups is in part what this book explores, but certainly one element of the attraction for the membership was the strong sense that they were participating in a vitally important process. The sense that they were living in momentous times, witnessing the demise of the old world and the beginning of the new, was ever present. The “mystical revival” was apocalyptic in tone and its most serious adherents believed that they were promoting an ancient wisdom tradition that would be crucial to the establishment of a spiritually enlightened new age.

Part of this general sense that the world stood on the brink of a great departure was clearly related to the approach of a new century, one that heralded the millennium. But it was equally bound up with an immediate conviction in many quarters that the old Victorian order was irrevocably passing, and that the early 1880s marked “the death pangs of the late world.”¹⁶ Winston Churchill noted retrospectively that the 1880s constituted “the end of an epoch,” the decade that saw an end to the “long dominion of the middle classes . . . and with it the almost equal reign of Liberalism.”¹⁷ With hindsight the Gladstone Parliament of 1880–85 could be seen as the watershed between the old Radicalism and the New Socialism, but Churchill’s more general sense that traditional forms of authority were finally broken during these years was shared by contemporaries of utterly different social backgrounds and political persuasions. Edward Carpenter, an iconoclastic socialist and sexual progressive, observed that the 1880s “marked the coming of a great reaction from the smug commercialism and materialism of the mid-Victorian epoch, and a preparation for the new universe of the twentieth century.” He also noted that this change was bound up with “the oncoming of a great new tide of human life over the Western World”:

It was a fascinating and enthusiastic period—preparatory, as we see now, to even greater developments in the twentieth century. The Socialist and Anarchist propaganda, the Feminist and Suffragist upheaval, the huge Trade-union growth, the Theosophic movement, the new currents in the Theatrical, Musical and Artistic worlds, the torrent even of change in the Religious world—all constituted so many streams and headwaters converging, as it were, to a great river.¹⁸

Much of this perceived ferment was bound up with Holbrook Jackson’s “Transcendental View of Social Life.” The social and political agitation surrounding questions of democracy, suffrage, women’s rights, organized labor, and the complex amalgam of issues arising from late-Victorian economic and industrial change, was shot through with seemingly quite different considerations about the place of “spirit” in modern society. Committed advocates of social transformation during this period were often as concerned with the idea of spiritual regeneration as political change, and socialism itself was by no means the strictly secular movement that some of its late-Victorian and subsequent proponents claimed. Even those like Henry M. Hyndman, the leader of the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (and hardly a man with pretensions to “mysticism”), was laughingly said to have

believed that with every new sign of industrial unrest “the Millennium was at hand.”¹⁹

A different kind of spirituality, one shorn of its conventional religious overtones, was widely conceived by those with an interest in the new emancipatory movements to have real relevance for the establishment of a society dedicated to the eradication of materialism and the promotion of individual fulfillment. Women with feminist proclivities often found in the “Theosophic movement” and other “mystical” groupings a more sympathetic reception and conducive atmosphere than socialist societies offered, and women and men alike discovered there a progressive element that sought a spiritual dimension to social and political change. Herbert Burrows, a member of Hyndman’s Social Democratic Federation, and Annie Besant, a Fabian socialist who came to embrace Hyndman’s views through her association with Burrows, were both political activists who found a spiritual home in Madame Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society. Besant, already famous in the 1880s for her secularist views, support for the dissemination of birth control information, political agitation, and championing of girl match makers in London, was one of Theosophy’s most notable recruits. By 1889, when she arrived at Blavatsky’s door, Besant was in her early forties, one of the best-known women in England, and the most prestigious and powerful female orator of the time.²⁰ Her move from Freethought to Theosophy caused extensive comment, but she was one of many at the turn of the century who considered Theosophy to offer a crucial spiritual counterpart to her political (and in the case of women, often feminist) views.²¹ Besant’s close friend and fellow Fabian, George Bernard Shaw, was familiar with Blavatsky’s work and claimed to have been the one who introduced Besant to *The Secret Doctrine*. Similarly, some of Besant’s Fabian colleagues, Frank Podmore and Edward Pease among them, were also keen members of the Society for Psychical Research, an elite group that investigated “psychical,” or paranormal, phenomena. Although George Bernard Shaw firmly resisted the blandishments of organized “mysticism,” he attended meetings of the Society for Psychical Research with his Fabian friends during “its most exciting time,” when it had its eye on Madame Blavatsky. It was not, therefore, so extraordinary that he should make this observation: “Thus I have attended a Fabian meeting, gone on to hear the end of a Psychical Research one, and finished by sleeping in a haunted house with a committee of ghost hunters.”²²

Although he was unable to document it clearly, Holbrook Jackson was convinced that towards the end of the century a “wave of transcendentalism swept the country” that was intimately bound up with the desire “for the im-

mediate regeneration of society.” He argued that this “wave” was concerned with “the abolition of such social evils as poverty and overwork, and the meanness, ugliness, ill-health and commercial rapacity which characterised so much of modern life.”²³ Jackson, too, was a Fabian socialist, but he backed his claim by reference to newspapers and journals of the day—among them W. T. Stead’s *Review of Reviews* and A. R. Orage’s *New Age*. Stead was the influential editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* during the 1880s and spearheaded some of the provocative crusading journalism for which the decade was renowned. During the 1890s he became an ardent spiritualist, and his successful monthly *Review of Reviews* and new quarterly *Borderland* reflected his interest in all things broadly occult. Alfred Richard Orage was a Fabian who joined the Theosophical Society in 1896 and went on in 1907 to revive and edit the *New Age*, one of the most avant-garde journals of the early twentieth century. The *New Age* (briefly coedited in the early days by Holbrook Jackson) became a forum for some of the most advanced writers and ideas of its day, and Orage used its pages to promote everything from Nietzschean philosophy to “mystical” topics and the values of Guild Socialism. Indeed, for Orage, the three were interlinked.²⁴ This combination of socialism and heterodox spirituality was equally evident in organizations like the “mystical” Theosophical Society and the largely socialist Fellowship of the New Life, the precursor of the Fabian Society and the group to which Edward Carpenter belonged. It was considered perfectly feasible at the turn of the century to adhere to a communitarian vision and socialist principles while espousing a belief in an unseen spirit world, a cosmic mind, and Eastern religion, and many did. This potent mix remained a feature of both progressive thought and “mysticism” into the 1900s.²⁵

Holbrook Jackson was thinking, too, of that important blend of attention to social issues, spiritual priorities, and a more broadly conceived concern with how life is lived that characterized some of the most potent thought of the period. The links between “mysticism,” humanitarian or socialist endeavors, and the world of arts and letters were strong. Proponents of aestheticism, Irish nationalist theatre, or the plays of Ibsen might simultaneously be involved in political agitation, trade unionism, astrology, Buddhism, antivivisection, vegetarianism, and the movement for dress reform. It was certainly remarked that, of those with “marked theosophical tendencies” who moved in London’s “mystical” circles, “some were vegetarians, nearly all were anti-vaccinationists, and some were socialists.”²⁶ Vegetarianism and the campaign against vaccination had long been popular platforms within radical and provincial spiritualist circles, and food reform, a “natural” or holistic approach to health care, and humanitarian causes of all kinds were

seen as integral aspects of the social regeneration to which the “mystically” inclined and many socialists were committed. Similarly, both progressive and “mystical” thought was often intrinsically bound up with an ethical stand against the soul-destroying effects of a materialistic society given over to the accrual of wealth and unrestrained commercialism. Jackson specified elements of the aesthetic movement of the 1880s, of the contributions of men like John Ruskin and William Morris who brought aesthetic sensibilities to bear on social questions, but equally had in mind the vibrant “intellectual, imaginative and spiritual activities” of the 1890s that were so concerned “with the idea of social life or, if you will, of culture.”²⁷ He rightly regarded these trends as far outstripping any kind of formal political allegiance, but placed a social value on what was elsewhere recognized as an attack by intellectuals on a philistine culture. Importantly, however, Jackson, was proposing a three-way relationship between the social, cultural, and “transcendental” that suggested that this was more than a reaction to the horrors of modern industrial society (which after all had been a persistent theme for well over a century). Instead, he was positing a powerful cultural critique that was intimately bound up with a spiritualized “social consciousness.”²⁸

One way of thinking about the “mystical revival” is to see it as a flight from the dislocations and upheavals of the period, in effect as a response to a society in crisis. Overwhelming anxiety and disillusionment brought about by a rapidly changing social order have been offered as the explanation for the occult revival of the post-1850s, and remains the mainstay of attempts to understand the engagement with occultism at the *fin de siècle*.²⁹ This explanatory framework suggests that occultism signified a retreat from a materialistic, corrupt, and disorderly social world into the tranquil reaches of metaphysical speculation and spiritual fulfillment. Such a characterization, however, ignores the importance of the spiritualist progressive platform and radically misunderstands the extent to which an interest in the occult was bound up with the new “social consciousness” at the end of the century. It is certainly the case that heterodox spirituality was often seen as an antidote to a society that seemed riven by unrivaled political, class, and gender antagonisms; but the changing social order was welcomed more than it was feared by adherents of “mysticism,” and occultism was not equated with withdrawal from the world. On the contrary, as we have seen, the new “spiritual movement” was intimately bound up with leading social and cultural pre-occupations and was regarded by many as the complement to social conscience and political engagement. This complementarity worked in complex ways to provide spiritual parallels to different visions of progress and evolution, and constituted an ambiguous rebuttal to the hegemony of

materialism, but it consistently served in the interests of social as well as spiritual regeneration. The “mystical revival” is indicative of the indissolubility of the social and spiritual at the fin de siècle rather than a splitting of the two into distinct and separate domains.³⁰

The most obvious explanation for the rise of occultism during the second half of the nineteenth century, however, and the one offered most frequently by historians, is the growth of religious doubt that contemporaries associated so strongly with the period. According to this line of reasoning, it was fear and insecurity in the face of a Godless world that sent thousands scrambling for religious alternatives. Formative studies of the terrain, which have markedly centered on Victorian psychical research rather than the occult per se, have reinforced this view. Alan Gauld’s study *The Founders of Psychical Research* presents “the genesis of reluctant doubt” and concomitant inability “to rest in unbelief” as a major motivating factor for those who turned to empirical studies of paranormal phenomena in the late nineteenth century. Frank Miller Turner’s *Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England* similarly argues that Alfred Russel Wallace, who became a spiritualist, and Henry Sidgwick and Frederic Myers, two of the most active Victorian psychical researchers, characterized those who “abandoned the Christian faith but then found it impossible to accept in its stead the scientific naturalism that proved so attractive to many of their contemporaries.”³¹ Similarly, Janet Oppenheim’s authoritative *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* sets up the discussion of the occult revival in terms of a singular “response to the Victorian crisis of faith.” An extended chronology and treatment of Theosophy notwithstanding, the very different manifestations of an interest in the occult are grouped together under the rubric of “a surrogate faith.”³²

In key respects, of course, this emphasis on the spiritual nature of the occult revival makes sense. Occultism was characterized by a particular view and understanding of the universe, and of the place of humankind within it, which could loosely be called religious. Indeed, it would clearly be foolish to discount the religious or spiritual imperative. It is the case that the women and men who were drawn to occultism, even the secularist spiritualists, were attracted by the promise of otherworldly compensations and realities. Spiritualism is manifestly concerned with the survival of the individual spirit, and subsequent “mystical” developments usually emphasized in some way the possibility of existence beyond death. Similarly, some psychical researchers undoubtedly were seeking proof of the immortality of the soul, and possibly all were searching for either consolation or meaning in an otherwise bleakly materialistic world. But compelling though the classification of occultism as

“a surrogate faith” might be, it cannot fully account for the kind of “mystical revival” that occurred at the turn of the century. In particular, it cannot explain the very different form taken by occultism during the late 1880s and 1890s. Religious or spiritual “yearnings” might help to explain why individuals were drawn to the occult during this period, but they cannot altogether account for the very significant differences between spiritualism and “mysticism.” More especially, religious longing does not explain the particular expression or articulation of “mystical” preoccupations. A Godless universe was certainly an important factor, but the new “spiritual movement” constituted a phenomenon that was definitively fin-de-siècle.

The “mystical revival” was characterized by the confluence of many of the most significant late-Victorian intellectual trends and fashionable interests. It was itself emblematic of the flourishing of things spiritual, but equally represented an *au courant* distaste for materialism and positivism and an ongoing (if qualified) enthusiasm for science. It spoke to a new taste for philosophical idealism and European vitalism but at the same time owed much to late-Victorian scholarship and the opening of new fields of academic inquiry. Folklore, anthropology, Egyptology, philology, and the study of comparative religion each had their place in a “mysticism” that looked East as well as West. Inevitably, at both the scholarly and popular levels, “mysticism” drew on an East that was structured by the European imagination. It was caught up in the Victorian romanticization of India and the “mysterious Orient” that manifested itself in a general interest in “Theosophy and Oriental philosophy of various sorts . . . and much talk and speculation, sometimes very ill-founded, about ‘adepts,’ ‘mahatmas,’ and ‘gurus.’”³³ But the European occult tradition claimed by “mysticism” was similarly “invented”—or, perhaps more accurately, reinvented—and played to a Victorian fondness for archaic origins, secret societies, and the Gothic that was perhaps best exemplified by the success of fiction like Rider Haggard’s *She* (1887) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). The broad appeal of the occult itself was evident in the fashionable craze for astrology, palmistry, and crystal gazing, while new journals like W. T. Stead’s *Borderland*, founded in 1893, and the Honorable Ralph Shirley’s monthly *The Occult Review*, established in 1905, catered to a general audience eager for discussions of everything from alchemy and Buddhism to hypnotism and psychology.³⁴ Stead’s *Borderland*, in particular, was aimed at the popular market and “the great public,” and the journal’s first issue proclaimed that it sought to reach “the great mass of ordinary people” in a much-needed democratization of “the study of the spook.”³⁵ The occult and the “mysticism” with which it was

synonymous were integral to the cultural milieu at the fin de siècle, and exerted an appeal that cannot be explained by reference to God alone.

One of the most distinctive aspects of the “mystical revival” was its catholic embrace of the East, and this is what defined the Theosophical Society, the most famous and internationally based occult group in late-Victorian Britain. The society, inaugurated in New York in 1875 by Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and her close associate, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, had its roots in the drive to reform American spiritualism but quickly attained a glamorous association with “oriental” mysticism. Madame Blavatsky was an enigmatic and charismatic figure with a suitably mysterious past. Born in the Ukraine in 1831 to a family that claimed German and Russian aristocratic lineage, she married young, and soon afterwards left her husband for a life of bohemian adventure. Blavatsky mythologized her existence over the next couple of decades, alleging that she traveled the world in search of spiritual enlightenment and studied with holy men in Tibet. By the time she surfaced in Cairo and Paris in the early 1870s Blavatsky was already involved with spiritualism, although she subsequently denounced it, and was apparently deeply read in Eastern religious lore. She met Olcott in New York, where a mutual interest in spiritualism but a disdain for its crude preoccupation with phenomena sealed their association. When they established the Theosophical Society Blavatsky appropriated the term *theosophy*, meaning “divine wisdom” or “wisdom of the gods,” and adapted an occult concept with venerable roots in Western philosophical and religious thought to her own personal brand of Eastern-oriented metaphysics. Her *Isis Unveiled* (1877), an unruly amalgam of Western occultism, Buddhist and Hindu teachings, and more than a dash of anti-Christian polemic, sold out its first edition of one thousand copies in ten days and positioned India near the center of spiritual gravity.³⁶ The following year Blavatsky and Olcott left New York for a tour of India and Ceylon, thereby sealing the Asian influence on the Theosophical Society. Theosophy went on to displace Egypt as the privileged “exotic” site of ancient wisdom so prevalent in the Western occult tradition, and offered an “esoteric” reading of some of the world’s great religious literatures. During the Edwardian years the Theosophical Society became more accommodating to “esoteric” Christianity, but meanwhile it promised a new and intriguing entrée to spirituality that complemented the Orientalism of late-Victorian culture.³⁷

The Victorian fascination with the Orient owed a great deal to the exposure of an educated public to the ethnological work of colonial administrators, missionaries, and explorers; the translations of sacred texts by scholars

and missionaries with linguistic expertise; and the emergence of a serious and professional study of language and culture as new academic specialties.³⁸ By the late-Victorian period these various endeavors had raised public awareness of pan-Asian cultures and geographies, and engendered a conversation about the relative merits of non-Christian religious traditions. The French Sanskritist, Buddhologist, and Indologist Eugène Burnouf was influential in inaugurating a serious Western interest in Buddhism around the midcentury, and English-speaking writers followed in his train.³⁹ Over the next two decades significant works on Buddhism were reviewed and discussed in British and American journals, but the appearance in 1879 of *The Light of Asia* by the British writer Edwin Arnold seized the general imagination on both sides of the Atlantic. This sympathetic life of the Buddha written in free verse was an immediate publishing success, going through over a hundred printings of various editions, and provided a popular parallel to the work of scholars such as Friedrich Max Müller, who conveyed key Buddhist precepts to an intellectual audience. The German-born Müller, who assumed the first chair of comparative philology at Oxford in 1868, was influential during the mid-Victorian period in the fields of folklore, comparative religion, and Orientalism, but the appearance in the 1870s of his monumental edited work, *Sacred Books of the East*, made the major religious texts of Asia available for the first time to an English-speaking public. The mid-1890s saw the publication of his edited *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, and it was through his close textual study and work with language that Müller became interested in religion as an intellectual problem. As he developed his theoretical ideas about the origin of religion, Müller parted company with the anthropologists. He countered an anthropological emphasis on “primitive” ancestor worship, animism, and so on by claiming the ability to conceive of divinity as inherently rational and human. His debates about the origin of religion with scholars like E. B. Tylor and Andrew Lang towards the end of the century were among the most famous intellectual controversies of the day.⁴⁰

The Theosophical Society thus emerged at a time when discussion of the world’s major religions and exposure to Eastern sacred texts were part of educated Victorian cultural life. Indeed, Olcott brought to the Theosophical Society a familiarity with the work of leading Orientalists, his love of ancient Indian culture, and a commitment to the Indian Renaissance movement in British India.⁴¹ Theosophy, like the occult more generally, was caught up in complex ways with British imperialism, although subsequently, primarily under the influence of Annie Besant (future president of the Theosophical Society), the society became closely identified with the cause of Indian na-

tionalism. Besant herself was to be interned in India for activities relating to her support of Indian Home Rule, and in 1917 was elected president of the Indian National Congress. This, however, lay in the future.

During their first tour of India at the end of the 1870s, Blavatsky and Olcott declared that they had come to the East to learn more about “oriental” religion. It was here, though, that they met Alfred Percy Sinnett and introduced the concept of the Mahatmas to the world. Sinnett was an influential newspaper editor, conservative in outlook, Tory in politics, and a member of the Anglo-Indian elite.⁴² He was intrigued by spiritualism and knew of Blavatsky’s reputation as a powerful medium, albeit one who tried to dissociate herself from spiritualism. Blavatsky duly impressed him with her demonstrations of phenomena, which she attributed to the “Brothers” who guided her spiritual writings and work. This was a reference to her claim that she had been chosen by a timeless Brotherhood of highly evolved Adepts living in Tibet—the Masters, or “Mahatmas”—to reveal the secret esoteric teachings that lay at the root of the world’s religions. Over the next few years Sinnett received more than a hundred “Mahatma” letters; he used the material in his influential books *The Occult World* (1881) and *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883), which drew great attention to both Madame Blavatsky and her Mahatmas.⁴³ Leaving Blavatsky in India, Sinnett returned to England, where he and his wife became highly influential in London Theosophical circles during the 1880s. He stoutly maintained the authenticity of the Mahatmas and the superiority of Indian teachings against those Theosophists who preferred an esoteric Christian tradition, and was in part responsible for the strong association of the Theosophical Society with the East.

The perceived failure of orthodox Christianity to speak to the great metaphysical questions of life was a crucial factor in the elevation of the East within late-Victorian occultism. The characterization of the East that emerged from Theosophy’s reworking of Asian religions mythologized the Orient as the true home of the mystical and spiritual, and paralleled the occidental tendency to feminize Eastern culture. On the other hand, Theosophy stressed the authority of Hindu and Buddhist teachings and claimed the centrality of the Buddhist esoteric tradition to the “divine wisdom” of Western occultism. Blavatsky herself was at pains to differentiate Theosophy from Buddhism in spite of the close affinities between the two, and maintained that Sinnett’s *Esoteric Buddhism* had unwittingly been responsible for a confusion of the one for the other. In her view, and in spite of her own references to “esoteric Buddhism,” Sinnett’s book should have been entitled *Esoteric Buddhism* [sic], “as then *Buddhism* would have meant what it was intended for, merely *Wisdomism* . . . instead of *Buddhism*, Gautama’s religious philoso-

phy. Theosophy, as already said, is the WISDOM-RELIGION.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, while Blavatsky emphatically stated that “Thesophy is not Buddhism,” and recognized that she had developed key Buddhist concepts within the context of a specifically Western occult tradition, her critics did not comprehend such fine distinctions.⁴⁵ Two years after Blavatsky’s death Max Müller published a lengthy and somewhat tongue-in-cheek rebuttal of what he referred to as her “Esoteric Buddhism,” complaining that “it was Buddhism misunderstood, distorted, caricatured.” Whilst he praised Colonel Olcott for publishing some of the “authentic texts of the old Brahmanic and Buddhist religions,” and admitted scholarly ignorance of the *Ma-hâyâna* school of Northern Buddhism that had so interested Blavatsky, he was not prepared to have Buddhist teaching “misrepresented as esoteric twaddle.”⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, there was no reconciliation of positions in the subsequent indignant (and self-aggrandizing) rebuttals of Sinnett or bemused “Rejoinder” by the eminent philologist.⁴⁷ It is noteworthy, however, that the serious study of Buddhism as a spiritual practice was later introduced in Britain by Allan Bennett, an erstwhile member of both the Victorian Theosophical Society and the foremost Magical Order of the day, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.⁴⁸

Part of the lure of the occult was, no doubt, its close association with secret traditions and claims to spiritual authority that rested on the transmission of ancient wisdom from mysterious and hidden high Adepts. As one erstwhile Theosophist later expressed it:

The idea of a group of divinised men, dwelling high up in the fastness of the Himalayas, and endowed with transcendent knowledge and powers, possessed a fascination for all but the strongest heads; and that many had succumbed to the glamour of the supposed “Mahatmas,” as the adept masters were called, was evidenced by their readiness to accept implicitly all that was put forward in their name, even to representing as blasphemous the suggestion of need for caution and deliberation.⁴⁹

The Victorian occult was symptomatic in this respect of a broader preoccupation with secret societies and fraternities, and indeed bore more than a passing resemblance to nineteenth-century Freemasonry.⁵⁰ But Madame Blavatsky’s Mahatmas, subsequently appropriated by Sinnett in his own bid for spiritual authority, were vital to the legitimization of the esoteric tradition imparted in Theosophical teachings. Blavatsky herself, like spiritualist mediums before her, claimed that her words were inspired by her spiritual guides, in this case her Tibetan Masters. She described the process of writ-

ing *Isis Unveiled* as one in which the words were dictated by one of her Masters, and freely admitted that she was able to transcribe material of which she had little conscious cognizance.⁵¹ Again this process, so akin to automatic writing, was familiar in the spiritualist world, but it is equally clear (just as her critics asserted) that Blavatsky rifled many nineteenth-century works on occultism when she wrote her book.⁵² Nevertheless, *The Secret Doctrine*, published in 1888 and usually considered Blavatsky's masterwork, amplified the theme of a secret esoteric tradition and set out in a massive fifteen hundred pages what the Masters apparently now sought to transmit via their chosen vessel. This book, as its title promised, taught that a veiled core of knowledge lies at the source of all religion, philosophy, and science, and provided an elaborate amplification of this inestimable wisdom or "secret doctrine." The appeal of this kind of occult knowledge, apparently proceeding from a higher authority, was sufficient to attract many new adherents to the Theosophical Society and retain them in spite of findings that cast doubt on the veracity of Theosophy's pedigree.

Given Madame Blavatsky's prowess as a spiritualist medium, her unconventional demeanor, and persistent rumors of a notorious past, questions about her authenticity hung over the Theosophical enterprise from the start. Some of its founding claims were tested between 1884 and 1885, however, when the Society for Psychical Research turned its attention to the Theosophical Society and its attendant Mahatmas, miraculous letters, and psychical phenomena. The society was founded in 1882 by Henry Sidgwick, one of the foremost philosophers of the nineteenth century, and a group of like-minded Cambridge men to investigate spiritualist and allied claims in an atmosphere of open and objective inquiry. The society boasted among its membership some of the most prominent figures of the day, including Balfour Stewart, a distinguished astronomer and professor of physics, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), Andrew Lang, and Arthur Balfour; among its honorary members were Gladstone, Ruskin, and Lord Tennyson. Its founding and status testify to the seriousness with which the occult was regarded by educated late-Victorians, and its own goals were not that far removed from one of the stated aims of the Theosophical Society: "To investigate the unexplained laws of Nature and the psychical powers latent in man."⁵³ Leading spiritualists and Theosophists joined the Society for Psychical Research, including Dr. George Wyld, president of the British Theosophical Society and an active member of the British National Association of Spiritualists; but after the first flush of enthusiasm the rapprochement between adherents of occultism and nonbelievers was often tried to the limit. Despite the friendly and sympathetic reception initially given to Blavatsky,

Olcott, and other Theosophists, the Society for Psychical Research went on to send an investigator to the Theosophical Society's headquarters in Madras and produced a devastating report in 1885 denouncing the Mahatmas and related phenomena as fraudulent.⁵⁴ Consequently the cordial relations between the Theosophical Society and the Society for Psychical Research were destroyed, and the report itself determined Olcott to distance himself from Blavatsky. Nonetheless, damaging though Theosophy's brush with the psychical researchers might have been, it did little to diminish the allure of either secret Masters or "oriental" wisdom.

The teachings of the Theosophical Society as they emerged over the 1870s and 1880s laid great stress on an ancient wisdom tradition in which religion and science are one, and presented a synthesis of evolutionary imperatives and religious concepts drawn mainly from Hinduism and Buddhism. Theosophy draws on Neoplatonic emanationism, in particular the concept of separation from and return to the Absolute, and reworks the Eastern concepts of karma and reincarnation to provide an evolutionary theory of both humankind and the universe. The entire complex pantheon of Theosophical ideas rests upon the idea of an evolutionary flux, a continuous ebbing and flowing of matter and spirit, marked by the periodic manifestation of an impersonal Absolute on unseen planes and in countless universes. In human terms, "Sparks of the Divine Fire" are incarnated through many lives and planetary existences in great waves of evolutionary development before finally approaching Adeptship and a return to the source. In its various earthly incarnations, and as elaborated in Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*, the human constitution is a sevenfold hierarchy of body, spirit, and soul and exists on three planes of being—the mental, astral, and physical. An impersonal law of karma determines individual reincarnations on earth, and the consummate development of the higher faculties is the prerequisite for the next stage of evolutionary development elsewhere in the manifesting Absolute. Theosophical teachings therefore lay great stress on individual evolution and perfection, and offer an all-embracing account of individual existence in a living, meaningful universe. It is this account of human existence and metaphysical cosmology that constitutes the "secret doctrine" at the heart of the world's ancient philosophical systems and great religions, and the Theosophical Society offered initiation into an esoteric tradition that had been jealously guarded by the Adepts for thousands of years.⁵⁵

It is not difficult to see the appeal of Theosophy for many late-Victorians. It provided a rationalizing account of the universe, and of the place of humankind within it, that spoke to both moral order and spiritual progress while appealing to an essential unity of "true" science and religion. Theo-

sophical ideas about the universe and evolution sounded a sympathetic note in a post-Darwinian age, when creationist ideas of God's universal "design" had been largely abandoned, and accorded with Victorian notions of the progress of the human race. Theosophy offered an alternative spiritual path that did not require belief in an anthropomorphized God but still sent the comforting message that there is life beyond death. And in its reworking of the idea of the material world that did not seem so far removed from new discoveries in physics and electromagnetism in the latter part of the century, Theosophy insisted that it was itself scientific. The number of distinguished scientists in the Society for Psychical Research, among them two of Britain's most eminent physicists, Lord Rayleigh and Joseph John Thomson, attests to the degree to which some scientists hoped either to preserve some spiritual aspect to the universe or gain new insight into the laws of nature through an investigation of psychical phenomena.⁵⁶ It was not far fetched in the context of the times to think that science and religion might still be compatible, and neither did it seem extraordinary to expect that Theosophy could provide the reconciliation of science and religion that many Victorians so desired.

Blavatsky's confident assumption that she could illuminate a middle way in the "death-grapple of Science with Theology" was therefore less arrogant and idiosyncratic than it appears. Her objection to "Mr. Tyndall, as the mouth-piece of nineteenth century science," and certainly one of the chief proponents of scientific naturalism, was shared by some scientists, let alone those without scientific pretensions. Blavatsky referred in *Isis Unveiled* to John Tyndall's notorious 1874 Belfast Address when, as president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, he had stated that "we claim, and we shall wrest from theology, the entire domain of cosmological theory." In fact, Tyndall had gone on to say: "All schemes and systems which thus infringe upon the domain of science must, in so far as they do this, submit to its control, and relinquish all thought of controlling it."⁵⁷ His remarks caused outrage in some circles, and it was widely held that Tyndall had overstepped the mark. There was uneasiness, too, among scientists, some of whom felt that science was not necessarily equipped to deliver the key to the mysteries of the universe. Even the distinguished physiologist William Benjamin Carpenter, rabid on the subject of spiritualism and its most relentless public critic, held deeply felt religious convictions that ruled out a strictly materialist perspective on life. There were those, too, who came close to an occult perspective in spite of their scientific work. Of these, probably the best known was the naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace, who embraced spiritualism and upheld a theory of the inseparability of spiritual and material evo-

lution that complemented Theosophical ideas. Indeed, it is possible that he was a member of the Theosophical Society.⁵⁸ Similarly, George John Romanes, Fullerian Professor of Physiology at the Royal Institution, and, like Wallace, interested in evolutionary theory, investigated spiritualism over several years and publicly abandoned his materialist stance in the early 1880s. Some years later he sought out Madame Blavatsky “to discuss the evolutionary theory set forth in her *Secret Doctrine*,” and by the 1890s had come to accept a metaphysical “cosmology” similar to that expounded by her in her major works.⁵⁹

Both Wallace and Romanes distanced themselves from scientific naturalism while retaining a commitment to the idea of a rational “scientific” religion that constituted part of the appeal of the occult. Indeed, far from occultism abandoning the field to science, it consistently referred to scientific inquiry as part of its legitimate domain. Spiritualists considered that they employed scientific and empirical methods in their own séances, and had initially welcomed the scientific inquiries of nonbelievers precisely because they believed that the empirical method would ultimately prove the objective existence of spiritualistic phenomena. Spiritualists were convinced that the spirits and “spirit matter” proved the existence of new natural laws that had so far escaped the notice of Victorian science. It quickly became apparent, however, that spiritualist phenomena and occult experience were not amenable to the methods of scientific empiricism as practiced by those outside the force field of occult beliefs. Whereas spiritualists and Theosophists espoused the tenets of rational empirical inquiry as well as a theory of matter so highly refined that it defied human observation, they consistently denounced “modern science” or, more often, simply “materialism.” Their tirades against science were directed against a militant Victorian scientism that, as they saw it, had trampled spirituality and the concept of spiritual experience underfoot. Theosophists and other occultists nevertheless spoke of themselves as “scientists,” believing that they were engaged in the true mission of science—a thorough and open-minded investigation of the mysteries of the universe.

One of the Theosophical Society’s stated “objects” was “to encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science,” as well as “to investigate the unexplained laws of Nature.” What Theosophists and scientists meant by “science” and the “laws of Nature,” however, were not necessarily the same thing. Although occultists claimed scientific status for their investigations, they agreed in general terms with Blavatsky’s assertion that “the anciently universal Wisdom-Religion” is “the only possible key to the Absolute in science and theology.”⁶⁰ In other words, as Sinnett expressed it,

"The facts are accessible if they are sought for in the right way, and the facts are these: The wisdom of the ancient world—science and religion commingled, physics and metaphysics combined—was a reality, and it still survives." For Victorian occultists, science and metaphysics were one and the same and found expression in the ancient wisdom. They used phrases like "occult philosophy" and "occult science" coterminously, and when they spoke of the latter they were referring not only to a science dedicated to knowledge of natural law but also the "true" constitution of the human entity and the Absolute. Occultists

inherit from their great predecessors a science which deals not merely with physics, but with the constitution and capacities of the human soul and spirit. Modern science has discovered the circulation of the blood; occult science understands the circulation of the life-principle. Modern physiology deals with the body only; occultism with the soul as well—not as the subject of vague, religious rhapsodies; but as an actual entity, with properties that can be examined in combination with, or apart from, those of the body.⁶¹

Occultists believed that "the science of Spiritual Causes and their Effects, of Super-physical Consciousness, of Cosmical Evolution" went far beyond the limitations of positivist science, and were not slow in attacking scientific naturalism for the narrowness of its vision and unwavering commitment to materialism.⁶² Deep antagonism towards the scientific exponents of a rigid empiricist materialism was often what drew spiritualists, Theosophists, and psychical researchers together. With different emphases and for somewhat different reasons, members of these groups denounced "a certain aggressive scientific coterie" (and cited arch villains of the "rationalistic spirit" like T. H. Huxley and Herbert Spencer) for having so successfully forced "convictions diametrically opposed to so vast a body of evidence down the throats of the educated public."⁶³

T. H. Huxley, professor of biology at the Royal School of Mines and a major advocate of Darwinian theory, was one of a small coterie of scientists who were not connected with the Society for Psychical Research but nevertheless concerned themselves with spiritualism. Unlike W. B. Carpenter, however, Huxley believed that a "new Nature created by science"—natural law translated into considerations of human evolution, behavior, and destiny (scientific naturalism, in fact)—was all that was necessary for understanding and guiding human existence.⁶⁴ He investigated spiritualist phenomena during the third quarter of the century when spiritualism was at the height of its Victorian popularity, and was unimpressed by what he saw. Huxley

refused invitations during the 1860s from both Alfred Russel Wallace and the London Dialectical Society to explore spiritualist phenomena in any systematic way, but nevertheless attended a séance in January 1874 in the company of Charles Darwin's son, George. His subsequent report reassured the senior Darwin, who had become sufficiently troubled by the enthusiasm for spiritualist séances of his gifted cousin, Francis Galton, and fellow scientist, William Crookes, to attend a séance himself.⁶⁵ Among those echoing Huxley's dim view of spiritualism with varying degrees of rancor were John Tyndall and Tyndall's mentor at the Royal Institution, Michael Faraday. These distinguished physicists typified a mid-Victorian scientific faith in a mechanical model of the universe that ruled out the concept of the creation of energy and left no room for the activities of a universal mind, deity, or spirits. Furthermore, as part of this model, Huxley, Tyndall, and Herbert Spencer promoted a particular version of atomic theory based on the idea of solid, indestructible particles of matter that underwrote the materialism of their view of the universe. This concept of matter was discredited by the discovery of subatomic particles towards the end of the century, but late-Victorian occultists deeply resented and took as their target the implacable materialism of the great popularizers of scientific naturalism when they railed against a narrow and dogmatic Victorian science.⁶⁶

Theosophists, like all occultists, abhorred what they saw as the gross materialism of the age. Their critique of materialism was central to the occult revival and invariably meant resistance to the intellectual dominance of an aggressive scientism, which refused to accept the reality of things of the spirit. Theosophy, however, went further in presenting an elaborate response to the problem posed by materialism. It not only pressed the importance of spirituality for the world's successful evolution, and that of humankind within it, but also emphasized as part of the occult "secret doctrine" the indivisibility of matter and spirit. This was implicit in Theosophical emanationism, but also underpinned Theosophy's claims to a wisdom that fully comprehended the laws of nature:

"Spirit" is a misleading word, for, historically, it connotes immateriality and a supernatural kind of existence, and the Theosophist believes neither in the one nor the other. With him all living things act in and through a material basis, and "matter" and "spirit" are not found dissociated. But he alleges that matter exists in states other than those at present known to science.⁶⁷

All occultists argued that science had not yet plumbed the mysteries of natural law, and understood little about the forces that emanated throughout

the universe; but Theosophists were given the added advantage of an explanatory “scheme of cosmogony,” which in its references to the endless flow of spirit and matter circumvented the question of an originary moment of creation and accounted more fully than spiritualism for apparently supernatural events. Certainly Theosophy was a far more sophisticated credo than spiritualism, and Theosophists also believed that they were justified in claiming that the Theosophical “secret doctrine” was superior to the blinkered banalities of Victorian science. Indeed, they felt increasingly justified in this stance as the conceptual difficulties associated with the mechanical worldview of classical physics were increasingly acknowledged towards the end of the century. But even given these developments, it seemed to Theosophists that they had the answers to questions about the world’s provenance and human destiny that would forever elude Western science. As for science, the occult became less of an object of hostility as spiritualism lost its popular appeal and slowly began to fade from view. The new fin-de-siècle “mysticism,” with its esoteric and inward turn, did not invite the same kind of hostile scientific attention. Both the scientific climate and occultism had changed.

Many of those who were attracted to Theosophy during the late 1870s and 1880s, however, were or had been practicing spiritualists. Indeed, as Blavatsky subsequently made clear, it was not so much “phenomena” to which she was opposed as the spiritualists’ reliance upon, explanation for, and method of obtaining it.⁶⁸ One of her earliest supporters was the barrister and respected Christian spiritualist Charles Carleton Massey, who met Blavatsky and Olcott while visiting America in 1875. Massey established an informal Theosophical discussion group after his return to England, and in 1878 went on to organize in London the first European branch of the Theosophical Society. Several key members of the British National Association of Spiritualists quickly became involved, including Emily Kislingbury, who had been a secretary of the BNAS and was duly appointed the first secretary of the British Theosophical Society. Their meetings were held for a while at the spiritualist headquarters on London’s Great Russell Street, but the small group who first gathered to discuss Theosophy brought to the society a variety of interests, including spiritualism, Christian mysticism, and the Hermeticism that constituted an important part of the Western occult tradition. At the outset the Theosophical Society was strongly associated with Freemasonry in terms of both its membership and organizational structure. It favored the secret passwords, signs, and ritualism traditionally associated with Freemasonry and occultism, although for the general membership these were subsequently abandoned. Women, however, were eligible for membership from the start, and later entered the society in considerable

numbers. Nevertheless, during the early days the London Lodge (as the original branch came to be known) retained the air of a refined gentleman's club. This was the territory of the eminently respectable professional middle classes who came together in the spirit of serious inquiry to pursue their metaphysical studies.⁶⁹

Tensions within the society around the issue of Christianity were evident from the outset, but they came to a head during the early 1880s. C. C. Massey resigned from the Theosophical Society in the summer of 1884 after taking issue with Blavatsky's Mahatmas, but an internecine power struggle involving the future direction of the society and centering on Alfred Sinnett and Anna Kingsford had already erupted in the London Lodge. Dr. Anna Bonus Kingsford was a remarkable woman. A Christian mystic, confirmed vegetarian, and militant antivivisectionist, Kingsford had received her medical training in Paris because (in common with the women of her generation) she had been barred from English medical accreditation. She was influential in raising public awareness of the horrors of vivisection, and as a qualified physician was particularly adept at rebutting claims that animal experimentation was vital to medical science. During the 1890s, following her untimely death, Kingsford's message was ably promulgated by Henry Salt's Humanitarian League.⁷⁰ In 1884, however, she was in her late thirties, golden-haired, beautiful, and charismatic (Blavatsky referred to her with more than a touch of irony as the "divine Anna"), and had assumed control of the London Lodge at the urging of her friend, the redoubtable Christian spiritualist and Theosophist Marie, Countess of Caithness and Duchesse de Pomar.⁷¹ Kingsford became president of the London Lodge from 1883 to 1884, and pledged it "to the study of all religions esoterically, and especially to that of our Western Catholic Church."⁷² Furthermore, she and her friend and spiritual collaborator, Edward Maitland, were not prepared to accept without reservation the authenticity of the Mahatmas, and wrote and circulated a privately printed letter critical of Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*.⁷³ Her stance and influence angered Blavatsky, who had little time for Christianity (particularly Catholicism), and alienated Sinnett, who admired Kingsford and paid tribute to her in the preface of *Esoteric Buddhism* but favored both the Mahatmas and Indian teachings. When in April 1884 Kingsford came up for reelection as president of the London Lodge she was met with strong opposition from the Sinnett faction. In the ensuing hubbub Colonel Olcott attempted unsuccessfully to adjudicate from the platform, and Blavatsky herself made a dramatic and unexpected entry after traveling from Paris for the meeting. She urged reconciliation of the warring factions, but in the aftermath Anna Kingsford was offered a charter for a separate Hermetic Theosophical So-

ciety. When Olcott subsequently ruled that Theosophists must chose between the two groups, Kingsford returned the charter and in May of that year established her own Hermetic Society.⁷⁴

The Hermetic Society had an influence on the development of late-Victorian “mysticism” that belied its mere two years of formal existence. Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland emphasized what they called “Esoteric Christianity” and looked to the Western occult tradition rather than the East for spiritual inspiration. Their Hermetic Society constituted a meeting place for those who wanted to pursue serious occult study of a different kind from that offered by the Theosophical Society, and attracted individuals who went on to establish important occult groups of their own. Kingsford and Maitland considered themselves deeply committed Christians, but their brand of “Esoteric Christianity” bore little relation to conventional Christian teaching. They believed that much of Christian theology should not be understood in a literal sense but as metaphor for the esoteric wisdom of the pagan mysteries as interpreted by the Western occult tradition. In particular, Kingsford believed in the power of mystical revelation and, indeed, this was her own route to esoteric wisdom. Her message was expounded in a series of lectures delivered in 1881 and published a year later as the influential *The Perfect Way*.⁷⁵ Kingsford’s teachings resembled those of Blavatsky’s in that she believed in reincarnation and the doctrine of karma as well as the existence of spirit realms, but her route to spiritual truths was mystical and visionary. Her book appealed to Christian spiritualists and Theosophists with Christian leanings, as well as Christian and non-Christian occultists who appreciated her emphasis on the reality of communion with nonhuman spiritual entities and her acute sense of the powerful presence of the divine. As she wrote in her diary shortly after the formation of the Hermetic Society, “What we really seek is to reform the Christian system and start a new Esoteric Church.”⁷⁶

The message expounded by Kingsford in *The Perfect Way* presented an esoteric reading of Christianity that paralleled the achievement of Blavatsky’s “Esoteric Buddhism.” Kingsford and Maitland were conversant with the Hermetic tradition upon which Blavatsky drew, and saw in Neoplatonism, the Hellenic and Egyptian “mystery schools,” the Cabala, and Hebrew legend many of the essential truths that they claimed had subsequently found their way into Christianity. They insisted that Christianity’s roots lay in the ancient wisdom of Hermeticism and the pagan schools but that this had been obscured over the centuries. More than anything, they taught that the life story of the biblical Jesus was less the history of an individual man than an allegory of the search for spiritual perfection that applies to each of us.

Not surprisingly, then, Kingsford and Maitland saw in the Gnosticism that had been ruled heretical by the early church the true Christian message, but one that had been almost lost. This sense of “esoteric” Christianity as a distillation of what Blavatsky called the “secret doctrine” reinforced Kingsford and Maitland in their belief that the Christian message was at once both universal and divine. A Christian spiritualist like C. C. Massey had no difficulty in subscribing to their views and was a supporter from the outset. He contemplated the amalgamation of the Hermetic Society with the “languishing” Christo-Philosophical Society, and noted the appeal that such a group would have for those “advanced Christians who are seeking to reconcile their denomination and calling (in the case of many of the clergy) with a more interior reading of the faith.”⁷⁷ In fact, the Hermetic Society had a broad appeal and assumed the character of a mixed discussion group, albeit one over which Anna Kingsford ruled in state as the lady-president. According to Edward Carpenter, who had known Maitland since boyhood, Kingsford and Maitland were both gifted if self-absorbed (and in the case of Kingsford, spiritually arrogant) individuals. He attended Hermetic Society meetings and remembered them with good-humored affection.⁷⁸

The Hermetic Society was typical of the eclecticism and kind of intermingling of occult personnel that was so common in this period, and the range of individuals and beliefs that it could accommodate is illustrated by its 1886 program of lectures. The featured speakers ranged across a broad spectrum of the social as well as the “mystical” world, and included the Honorable Roden Noel, Arthur Lillie, Mohini M. Chatterji, S. L. MacGregor Mathers, and Dr. W. Wynn Westcott. Of these, Roden Noel, son of the Earl of Gainsborough, was a founding member of the Metaphysical Society (a famous elite Victorian discussion club), active in the Society for Psychical Research, and well placed in court circles; Arthur Lillie was a writer on occult topics; Mohini Mohun Chatterji was a young Brahmin lawyer and poet, a member of an illustrious Hindu family, and protégé of Madame Blavatsky’s who acted as an envoy for Theosophy in London, Paris, and Dublin; Dr. William Wynn Westcott was a coroner and high-ranking Freemason who, like the poverty-stricken Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, was about to carve out a place for himself in occult history as a leading member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The topics under discussion in the Hermetic Society were similarly reflective of a broad range of interests: “Bible Hermeneutics,” “The Higher Alchemy” (a series of lectures delivered by Edward Maitland), “The Nature and Constitution of the Ego” (a presentation given jointly by Kingsford and Maitland), “Jacob Boehme,”

"The Indian Rama, his Connection with the Osirian and Eleusinian Mysteries," "The Kabala," and "Krishna." The flexibility of the "Hermetic" brief is illustrative of Anna Kingsford's earlier pledge to encourage the inclusive study of all religions, and Edward Maitland's interest in and considerable knowledge of Hermetic topics.⁷⁹

Kingsford's death in 1888 at the age of forty-two left her followers bereft, but her "interior reading of the faith" was absorbed in a myriad of different ways as her writings went through new editions and translations and her ideas were taken up by different constituencies. Maitland, desolate at his loss, sought contact with her through spiritualist mediums and made a concerted attempt to sustain and propagate her message. He edited a collection of her prophetic and inspired dreams, published verbatim many of her visions and revelations, wrote an account of her "New Gospel of Interpretation," and in 1896, a year before his death, published his biography of Kingsford and account of her Christian message.⁸⁰ He went on in the early 1890s to found a new society, The Esoteric Christian Union, with the express purpose of exploring Kingsford's teachings; but without her spiritual authority and charismatic presence it seems to have come to nothing. By the 1890s, however, Kingsford's ideas were already outstripping the circles in which she and Maitland had moved. She was much admired in France by the Italian occultist Baron Nicolas-Joseph Spedalieri, and both he and Marie, Countess of Caithness and Duchesse de Pomar, supported her work and message. Similarly, shortly after Kingsford's death, Édouard Schuré wrote the preface to the 1891 French edition of *The Perfect Way*. The vogue for "Esoteric Christianity" had already been promoted in France by the publication in 1889 of Schuré's hugely successful *The Great Initiates*, a book that represented in eclectic and popularized form the kinds of ideas espoused by Anna Kingsford. Schuré wrote of his intuitive understanding of the relationship between the pagan Mysteries of Eleusis and the revelation of Christ, a theme that echoed Kingsford's insistence on Christian teachings as part of the older "wisdom." *The Great Initiates* also claimed the historical Jesus as the last "Great Initiate," a man who had been trained by the Essenes and initiated into the Egyptian "mystery school." In other words, according to Schuré—and in an argument that reverberates in occult circles today—Jesus was an occultist. By 1912 the book had gone into twenty-four printings of various editions, and had been translated into German, Italian, Spanish, and Russian as well as English. "Esoteric Christianity" had arrived in Europe.⁸¹

The success of Anna Kingsford's ideas and Schuré's work in France during the late 1880s and 1890s was not an aberration. As in England, France

had already been caught up in spiritualism on a grand scale, and the 1880s saw French occultism moving into a second phase. A Theosophical group, the Société théosophique d'Orient et d'Occident, had been established in Paris during the early 1880s by Marie, Countess of Caithness and Duchesse de Pomar, an ardent spiritualist and admirer of Allan Kardec. Kardec, the pseudonym of H. L. D. Rivail, was a leading French spiritualist, and his *Le Livre des Esprits* (1856) took a radically different view of spiritual evolution from that of the British and American spiritualists. Kardec's "spiritisme" supported the idea of reincarnation, and it was not difficult for Lady Caithness to embrace Theosophy—albeit of the Anna Kingsford variety—as part of the pantheon of her beliefs. She became prominent in Theosophical circles on both sides of the channel, and when Madame Blavatsky arrived in France from India in the spring of 1884 the titled woman made her homes in Nice and Paris available to the occult doyenne. Blavatsky in turn approved Lady Caithness's Parisian Theosophical group, and it became the first Theosophical Society in France. In 1884 occult activity in Paris received the triple impetus of the visit by Madame Blavatsky and the publication of two novels: Joris-Karl Huysmans' sensational "decadent" *A Rebours*, and the occultist Joséphin Péladan's *Le Vice Suprême*, the first volume of a series entitled *La Décadence Latine*. Decadence and occultism were twinned in these novels in a way that was to be suggested by Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), and that seemed so pertinent to Holbrook Jackson when he pointed to the relationship between "the revival of mysticism" and the decadence associated with the arts and literature of the period.⁸²

Meanwhile, Paris was establishing itself as a center of magical activity. Eliphas Lévi, one of the great nineteenth-century occultists, had died during the 1870s, leaving behind him some of the classics of the modern magical tradition and an influence that was felt in Britain and throughout Europe.⁸³ The Baron Spedalieri, a supporter of Anna Kingsford, had been for a while one of Lévi's devoted followers after reading the latter's *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* (Dogma and ritual of high magic); and Lévi was acquainted with other midcentury occultists, including Edward Bulwer Lytton, author of the "Rosicrucian" novel *Zanoni*, and Kenneth Mackenzie.⁸⁴ Lévi and Mackenzie were to influence the development of British ritual magic, but in France Lévi's mantle was assumed by members of a new generation of occultists: Dr. Gérard Encausse, who was to gain fame as the occultist who wrote under the name of Papus; the Marquis Stanislas de Guaita; and the novelist Joséphin Péladan. Of these, Encausse was a member of the Theosophical Société Isis but left in 1888 to form his own Groupe Indépendant d'Etudes Esotériques, and during the 1890s became highly influential in French Mar-

tinist circles.⁸⁵ All three men, however, were major participants in de Guaita's Cabalistic Order of the Rosy Cross, founded in 1888 and one of the leading occult societies of the day. During the next few years a battle raged between de Guaita and Péladan over the direction of the Cabalistic Order. Péladan sought a reconciliation of occultism and Catholicism and felt affronted by the eclecticism of de Guaita's Rosy Cross. In a statement directed at de Guaita, and suggestive of the strong similarities between French and British "mysticism," he wrote: "My absolutist nature isolates me from your eclectic work . . . and I refuse to rub shoulders with spiritualism, masonry or Buddhism."⁸⁶

The interconnection of spiritualism, Freemasonry, and Eastern religion that was symptomatic of British and French occultism was similarly evident in a flourishing "mystical" culture in Russia. News of Blavatsky was just filtering through to Russia at the time of her 1884 visit to France, and she encountered interested fellow Russians both in Paris and on the Riviera. In particular, she charmed a group of aristocratic Russians in Nice and the popular novelist Vsevolod Solov'ev in Paris. Solov'ev later changed his mind about Blavatsky, and his more negative assessment was reflected in the pieces he wrote on her in the early 1890s for the popular journal *Russkii Vestnik*. These articles were worked into his subsequent book, translated into English in 1895 by Walter Leaf of the Society for Psychical Research as *A Modern Priestess of Isis*. The book went through several Russian editions and raised the profile of Blavatsky, if in a not altogether flattering light. Theosophy finally began to establish a serious reputation for itself in Russia after the turn of the century, during the Golden Age of Russian occultism when spiritualism still flourished, occult societies sprang up overnight, the occult classics went into translation and new publications proliferated (particularly after 1905, when censorship restrictions eased), and French occultists like the Martinist Papus became highly influential in St. Petersburg court circles.⁸⁷

Nineteenth-century French occultism and its association with the "high magic" of Eliphas Lévi and esoteric Masonry of Martinism played an important part in the propagation of European occultism at the turn of the century.⁸⁸ These elements, however, were themselves woven out of a rich fabric of European occultism that stretched back centuries and embraced metaphysicians, mystics, and occultists from Britain as well as eastern and western Europe. The European tradition that brought together "high magic" and the more speculative forms of occultism, however, was Rosicrucianism, and the foremost exponent of Rosicrucianism as it emerged from the shadows after nearly three centuries was the late-Victorian Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.⁸⁹ The Order is the subject of chapter 2, but a

few observations about the most important of the late-Victorian magical societies are useful at this point.

The secret and hierarchical Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was established in the late 1880s by three Freemasons; two of whom, William Wynn Westcott and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, were admirers of Anna Kingsford and had been members of her Hermetic Society. The Order is usually remembered by scholars today only in connection with its most famous initiate, the Irish poet and playwright W. B. Yeats; but adherents of the largely middle-class Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn numbered in the hundreds during the late 1880s and 1890s and included gifted women and men from the world of arts and letters. Initiates studied the symbolism of astrology, alchemy, and Cabala; were instructed in geomantic and tarot divination; and learned the underpinnings of basic magical techniques. A student progressed through the grades of the Order by means of a series of examinations, but admission to the advanced Second (or Inner) Order was selective—a privilege rather than a right. It was in the Second Order that adherents began to access the secrets of ritual magic, that is, magic as a unique undertaking through which invisible forces could be influenced and controlled.

This kind of practical occultism held great appeal for the select group who became fledgling Adepts in the Second Order of the Golden Dawn, but it was not without controversy. Madame Blavatsky drew a distinction between Theosophy as a metaphysical and spiritual path and that aspect of the occult tradition that emphasized ritual magic:

Occultism is not magic. It is *comparatively* easy to learn the trick of spells and the methods of using the subtler, but still material, forces of physical nature. . . . Occultism differs from Magic and other secret Sciences as the glorious sun does from a rush-light.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, some members of the Theosophical Society were keen to receive advanced instruction in occultism of a more practical nature. As a result, and partly in response to the rival attractions of the Golden Dawn, Blavatsky established in 1888 a special Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, a private, privileged, and powerful inner sanctum that became a proving ground for some who wanted to venture into the practice of the occult arts. After Blavatsky's death in 1891, and particularly after Annie Besant was elected president of the Theosophical Society in 1907, the Esoteric Section became heavily involved with magic, or practical occultism. At the end of the 1890s, though, and undoubtedly with the Golden Dawn in mind, Be-

sant was still warning Theosophists (publicly, at least) that “many promising beginners have lost their way and wasted their lives” in the study of the “‘occult arts’”: “Geomancy, palmistry, the use of the tarot, etc., all these things are well enough . . . *but they are not occultism.*”⁹¹

While Annie Besant was making a show of holding the Blavatsky line against magic, the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn were offering the opportunity for intensive occult study that included some understanding (if not necessarily the practice) of practical occultism. There were those in both organizations, however, who eschewed the practical occult arts in favor of the study of “ancient wisdom” as a personal pathway to mystical experience. This was one of the tensions that later tore the Golden Dawn apart, but it was symptomatic of a more general issue. Occultism and mysticism, while closely associated, were not strictly the same, and some individuals differentiated carefully between them. Anna Kingsford, for example, who preferred to use the phrase “the revival of the Hermetic philosophy” to explain what she was about, differentiated between occultism and mysticism (privileging the latter) even though she actually embraced both. During one of the inspired revelations through which she received her spiritual teachings, she was told the following:

The adept, or “occultist,” is at best a religious scientist; he is not a “saint” . . . occultism, although it holds the “power,” holds neither the “kingdom” nor the “glory,” for these are of Christ. The adept knows not the kingdom of heaven.⁹²

Kingsford dismissed Madame Blavatsky, with her mysterious Eastern Masters, as an “occultist.” Blavatsky, on the other hand, as an occultist who declared herself against magic, disapproved of the self-proclaimed mystic’s pragmatic use of ritual magic to achieve the demise of “leading vivisectors” like Louis Pasteur.⁹³ In practice the boundaries between these positions—occult knowledge as metaphysical “ancient wisdom,” as necessarily incorporating the practical occult arts, and as the pathway to mystical illumination—were blurred. Blavatsky spoke out against practical occultism but was herself a practicing “initiate”; Kingsford thought of herself as a mystic but practiced magic; magical initiates of the Golden Dawn considered Adeptship a culmination of each of these; and none would have disagreed with Annie Besant when she stated that “[t]rue occultism . . . is . . . the development of the spiritual nature.”⁹⁴ Nevertheless, serious students of the occult understood what these different viewpoints signified, and in some cases the

difference between those who sought knowledge of or power over the secret forces of the universe and those who aspired to mystical union with the divine became too marked to accommodate.

There is no doubt that there was a fin-de-siècle revival of mysticism in the strict sense, reflected in part by new initiatives within more conventional religious quarters as well as by “occult” mysticism. The “hermeneutic” biblical scholarship that gained ground during the 1880s under the auspices of Professor William Robertson Smith of the Free Church of Scotland emphasized a nonliteral and symbolic interpretation of Scripture; and in 1889 the publication of *Lux Mundi*, a collection of essays written by moderate High Churchmen, famously sought to introduce leading themes of the new biblical criticism to a general audience.⁹⁵ At the same time a revived interest in medieval and Renaissance “esoteric” Christian mysticism spread rapidly through both the Roman Catholic and Protestant communities. In 1899 William Ralph Inge delivered his “Bampton,” and the publication of his *Christian Mysticism* in the same year acknowledged “a great revival of interest in the subject” and represented the cautious and scholastically respectable side of some of the ideas espoused only a decade earlier by Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland.⁹⁶ This interest was further reflected in the appearance of increasing numbers of books and publications devoted to an “esoteric” theme. Four books published between 1889 and 1899—Inge’s *Christian Mysticism*, Edouard Schuré’s *The Great Initiates*, Arthur Lillie’s *Modern Mystics and Modern Magic*, and the American journalist Prentice Mulford’s *The Gift of the Spirit*—stand at radically different points on the scholarly spectrum, but together they indicate the extent to which an “esoteric” understanding of Christianity had entered the popular domain by the end of the century.⁹⁷

Ironically, given the earlier standoff between Anna Kingsford and Alfred Sinnett, the Theosophical Society was far from immune from the appeal of “esoteric” Christianity. At the turn of the century Annie Besant published her *Esoteric Christianity*, a book that reiterated much of Kingsford’s message about the importance of Gnosticism and emphasized the mythical and symbolic meaning of biblical events.⁹⁸ The book was in tune with its day, appealing to the kind of insights promoted by the new biblical criticism as well as an occult understanding of Christian teachings. Anna Kingsford’s teachings, based on her communions with the spirit world over thirty years earlier, reached a wide audience via Besant’s adaptation of them to her own brand of Theosophical theology. Edward Maitland had since died and was no longer there to protect Kingsford’s provenance or claim rightful recognition on her behalf. But even though the Hermetic Society and Maitland’s Esoteric Christian Union never achieved the status or following of the Theo-

sophical Society, Kingsford and Maitland were still remembered and memorialized within occult circles some twenty years after the former's death.⁹⁹ Kingsford's message, shorn of much of its Gnostic connotations, reached a prewar high point in 1911 with the publication of Evelyn Underhill's acclaimed classic statement of mystical Christianity, *Mysticism*. Here Underhill distinguished carefully between mysticism and magic, stating, much as Kingsford had, that mysticism "in its pure form, is the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute. . . . Not to *know about*, but to *Be*, is the mark of the real initiate."¹⁰⁰ Underhill, active in Arthur Edward Waite's break-away group of those in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn who denounced practical occultism in favor of mystical Christianity, became one of the most respected members of an esoteric tradition with its roots in Victorian occultism. Although she despaired the use of *mystical* as a catchall for occultism, she represented one strand of the late-Victorian "mystical revival" in its coming of age.

The first decade of the new century saw a proliferation of groups, societies, and periodicals, each devoted to different aspects of occultism. The Theosophical Society had already established its own journals, among them *The Theosophist*, *Theosophical Siftings*, and *Lucifer*, and it remained the most visible and successful of the late-Victorian occult organizations. It weathered several storms and survived schisms before settling down under Annie Besant's presidency to await the coming of the next great World Teacher.¹⁰¹ In 1909 George R. S. Mead, who had been private secretary to Madame Blavatsky, formed the Quest Society as an antidote to Besant's influence and that of her close associate, Charles Leadbeater.¹⁰² He edited *The Quest*, a quarterly review that served as the mouthpiece of the society, and it appeared with a familiar triumvirate of aims: to promote "enquiry into the nature of religious and other supranormal experiences and the means of testing their value"; to strengthen a "love of wisdom" as a stimulant to "a practical philosophy of life"; and "to emphasise the need of a vital science to crown and complete the discoveries of psychical research."¹⁰³ Like Ralph Shirley's *Occult Review* founded a few years earlier, *The Quest* was directed towards a general but educated audience and was as likely to feature articles on Bergson and Nietzsche as paganism and Buddhism. Frequent contributors during the early years were those who had been or remained associated with the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. A. E. Waite, vice president of the Quest Society, and Evelyn Underhill were both contributors, while the writers Arthur Machen, W. B. Yeats, and Ezra Pound (who as a young man moved in these circles) all wrote for the quarterly. To some extent Mead's small Quest Society served as a calm

harbor of rarefied discussion after some of the headier excesses of the turn of the century. Certainly there were those emerging from the bruising battles fought out within the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn who renounced their commitment to magic in favor of ongoing metaphysical discussion.¹⁰⁴

By 1910 those elements of the “mystical revival” that had initially been woven so tightly together—metaphysical deliberation, practical occultism or magic, and mysticism as Underhill defined it—were becoming more differentiated as breakaway societies and new organizations emerged to cater to different interest groups. There was a sense in which the Edwardian years marked a maturation of the “mysticism” that had burst onto the scene during the later 1880s. The Theosophical Society was in the process of establishing a strong organizational base that stretched from India to Britain, and in its different manifestations became operational throughout Europe and the United States. In Germany, Dr. Rudolph Steiner, who had been the general secretary of the German branch of the Theosophical Society since 1902, formed the Anthroposophical Society, a group that also went on to achieve international status and a considerable following. Steiner promoted an eclectic blend of Theosophical ideas, “esoteric” Christianity, the occultism of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and German idealism.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, the “esoteric” Christian message was being broadcast through channels both occult and orthodox, while some of the metaphysical implications of occultism were promoted in the vitalism espoused by Henri Bergson, a philosopher who became celebrated in Britain prior to the outbreak of war. At the root of many of these developments lay the “ancient wisdom” of a Western occult tradition that was familiar to Anna Kingsford, revered by Madame Blavatsky, and taught within the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The Golden Dawn single-handedly revived and taught a Rosicrucian magical tradition that united practical occultism with the mystical and metaphysical, and reworked it so that it spoke in the language of “ancient wisdom” to the most immediate of modern concerns. And far from appealing merely to a fringe constituency, the Golden Dawn attracted some of the most interesting and creative women and men of the day. It is to these exemplars of fin-de-siècle magic that we now turn.

CHAPTER TWO

✧ Magicians of the New Dawn ✧

At the secret heart of the late-Victorian occult revival lay the revitalized practice of ritual magic as taught to an initiated elect in the foremost Magical Order of the day, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.¹ The short history of the Golden Dawn before its fracturing in the early 1900s replicates in intensified and dramatic detail some of the salient features of its more visible and outwardly successful rival, the Theosophical Society; and yet the Order had a pedigree, persona, and legacy uniquely its own. Like the Theosophical Society, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn represented an occult undertaking in the grand Victorian style. Similarly, it suffered damaging personality clashes and power struggles, intrigues within its powerful inner circle, and sexual scandals that threatened its credibility. It was riven with dissent, its own provenance and mysterious “Secret Chiefs” were called into question, and it ultimately splintered over the twin issues of direction and purpose. But its corpus constituted a highly ambitious, effective, and creative synthesis of “ancient wisdom” akin to Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky’s achievement, and the Golden Dawn itself came to exemplify in tone and substance precisely what might be meant by a Magical Order. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn taught the theory and practice of ritual magic or practical occultism without any of the hesitations and prevarications of the Theosophical Society, and it became the beacon around which the lives of its most devoted initiates were organized. The Order demanded and received a level of commitment that threatened temporal careers, and it served as a leveler of gender and financial distinctions at a time when these still operated as significant factors of exclusion. Perhaps most important, the Order was responsible for fashioning a uniquely modern magical tradition with its roots in a “lost” and arcane past and its aspirations directed towards ideals of progress and future regeneration. It was a child of

its moment, but the Golden Dawn has done more than any other Order to influence the development of modern magic in Britain, Europe, and the United States during the course of the twentieth century. It was without doubt the hidden jewel in the crown of the fin-de-siècle “mystical revival.”

Ritual magic has a long and august history, but it emerged most strongly in the nineteenth century in its Rosicrucian form, that is, as a particular configuration of seventeenth-century occult learning.² The Rosicrucian tradition has its roots in Jewish mysticism and Judeo-Christian sources of ancient wisdom as interpreted by Renaissance occultists, and it is closely identified with the powerful “Egyptian” writings of Hermes Trismegistus, from which the term *Hermetic* derives.³ Arthur Edward Waite, the Victorian occultist and one-time member of the Golden Dawn, noted that the terms “transcendental, Hermetic, Rosicrucian, mystical, and esoteric or occult” were used “indiscriminately” during the nineteenth century, and was careful to use *Hermetic philosophy* to mean “an actual, positive, and realizable knowledge concerning the worlds which we denominate invisible, because they transcend the imperfect and rudimentary faculties of a partially developed humanity.” Similarly, he viewed *Hermetic science* as “a method of transcending the phenomenal world, and attaining to the reality which is behind phenomena.”⁴ These definitions equally fitted the designation of “magic” as it was taught in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Hermeticism as embodied in the Rosicrucian tradition was marked by an elaborate interplay of the philosophical or spiritual with the practical and magical, and it was this heady combination that found expression in the occultism of the new Order. The Golden Dawn’s name referred to the seventeenth-century Rosicrucian promise of the coming of a new spiritually enlightened age, but it spoke, too, to the occult goal of “seeking the light” as sometimes represented by the evocative image of an alchemical sunrise. As so often with the occult, the symbolism is multivalent, but the message is hard to miss. The Order’s name spoke to the realization of a Rosicrucian rebirth, the regeneration of the old, corrupt world and dawning of a new spiritually enlightened era. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was established with a view to educating its initiates in the complex arcana of a revised Rosicrucian tradition in anticipation of the immanent dawning of a new “golden” age—timely notions for many at the fin de siècle.

The Golden Dawn was formally established in the late 1880s and from the outset represented itself as a direct link with the arcane traditions of the past. Although its founding documents were probably spurious, and its major rituals undoubtedly the work of Victorian occultists, its teachings were based upon an ingenious modern interpretation of the Rosicrucian tradi-

tion further informed by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century “oriental” scholarship and recent work in Egyptology. The precise origins of the Order will probably never be known, but early initiates of the Golden Dawn had no particular cause to question the provenance of its founding documents. New members of this self-styled Hermetic society received a copy of “The Historic Lecture for Neophytes,” which laid claim to a venerable group of Adepts, including the renowned French occultist Eliphas Lévi and the Victorian occultists Kenneth Mackenzie and Frederick Hockley, and traced the roots of the Order’s teaching to the legendary medieval Rosicrucian illuminati of Germany and beyond to the wisdom of ancient Egypt.⁵ The elaborate ritualized schema to which Neophytes were introduced in the Golden Dawn, the serious tone of the endeavor, and the promise of induction into “the principles of Occult Science and the Magic of Hermes” were sufficient to persuade many that they were participating in an Order with an impeccable occult tradition. Indeed, although the Lecture referred to an earlier nineteenth-century hiatus in the formal transmission of knowledge, all but a few were unaware of the very recent formation of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.⁶

According to Golden Dawn tradition, however, the Order, although of late-Victorian origin, did indeed have an immaculate pedigree. The story runs that in August 1887, Dr. William Wynn Westcott, a respectable London coroner, a Freemason, and an occultist, came into possession of an old manuscript written in cypher that contained the rudiments of five pseudo-Masonic rituals. The manuscript had apparently been passed to him by the Reverend A. F. A. Woodford, an elderly Freemason with occult interests who suggested shortly before his death that the document contained the key to certain Rosicrucian secrets. The manuscript, written in a cypher with alchemical associations, had been reproduced in the 1561 Paris edition of the *Polygraphiae* of the Abbot Johann Trithemius (1462–1516). Westcott, well educated in the ways of occult cyphers, decoded the document and found that it contained references to “Fratres and Sorores,” the “grade of Neophyte,” and a Temple of the “Golden Dawn.” With its reference to “brothers and sisters,” this was clearly no orthodox Masonic production. Traditional craft Freemasonry excluded women, and as Westcott archly remarked at the time, this was “an exclusion which, were we about to constitute a new form of concealed worship, would hardly be tolerated in the present year of grace, and certainly, could not be defended in argument.”⁷

Intrigued and impressed, Westcott invited a fellow occultist and Freemason, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, to develop the five rituals so that they could be performed. He also followed up on a hint from Woodford and

a lead found among the pages of the manuscript alerting him to the presence in Germany of a high Rosicrucian Adept, one Fräulein Sprengel—known subsequently in the Golden Dawn as Soror Sapiens Dominabitur Astris. Westcott wrote to the Soror and duly received permission to found an English offshoot of the German occult Order “Die Goldene Dämmerung” (the golden dawn). Thus equipped, and endowed with high honorary ritual Order grades, Westcott, together with MacGregor Mathers and a fellow occultist Freemason, Dr. W. R. Woodman, established in London in 1888 the Isis-Urania Temple of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The Isis-Urania Temple, or Lodge, was followed shortly by the Osiris Temple in Weston-super-Mare, the Horus Temple in Bradford, and the Amen-Ra Temple in Edinburgh. Several years later, MacGregor Mathers founded the Ahathoor Temple in Paris.

From the outset the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was associated closely with occult Freemasonry. As Westcott noted, “The secrets of Occultism are like Freemasonry; in truth they are to some extent the secrets that Freemasonry has lost.”⁸ The three “Chiefs” of the Order, Westcott, MacGregor Mathers, and Woodman, were Freemasons who were also members of a fraternity called the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (and more familiarly, the Soc. Ros. or the Rosicrucian Society of England). This society in turn was supposedly based in part on a late eighteenth-century German Masonic Order, the Order of the Gold and Rosy Cross. The Rosicrucian Society had been established in 1866 by Robert Wentworth Little, a young Freemason who was acquainted with Kenneth Mackenzie, and was restricted in membership to Master Masons. It attracted a good many spiritualists during the early days, including the Reverend Stainton Moses, one of the most respected spiritualist mediums, and provided a forum for those interested in Masonic symbolism and the study of “Rosicrucian” subjects like the Cabala. Two of the occultists claimed for the Golden Dawn in the Order’s “Historic Lecture for Neophytes,” Kenneth Mackenzie and Frederick Hockley, were members, and Lord Lytton, author of *Zanoni*, became its Grand Patron in 1871. Woodman became the society’s Supreme Magus (or Head) in the late 1870s; Westcott was subsequently the secretary of the society’s Metropolitan (or London) College and became Supreme Magus following Woodman’s death; and both Westcott and MacGregor Mathers were members of the society’s High Council.⁹ The society increased its modest scope and activities during the mid-1880s at a time when occult activity in general was being stepped up, and its influence was felt in the new Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn as it developed under the direction of its Masonic Chiefs.

Of the three Chiefs of the Golden Dawn, Westcott and MacGregor Mathers were by far the most active and important. It was Westcott who apparently received the communications and necessary authorizations from Soror Sapiens Dominabitur Astris (Soror S. D. A.), and Westcott who received the notification of her death in 1890, when the Golden Dawn was safely up and running.¹⁰ MacGregor Mathers was initially responsible for writing up the Warrant for the Isis-Urania Temple and elaborating the rituals associated with the First Order. The third Chief, Dr. Woodman, who was considerably older than either Westcott or MacGregor Mathers, remained in the background and died at the beginning of the 1890s. It was therefore Westcott and MacGregor Mathers who defined both the form of and direction taken by the Golden Dawn. Westcott was primarily interested in creating a society for the promulgation of Rosicrucian knowledge; MacGregor Mathers was later instrumental in developing the Second Order as a training ground for magicians. Together they brought to the endeavor a wide and erudite knowledge of arcane matters.

However, the two men were very different. William Wynn Westcott, who was born in 1848, studied medicine at University College, London, became a Deputy Coroner in the early 1880s, and Coroner for North-East London a decade later. He was, as we have seen, a Freemason and important member of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia. He was also an admirer of Anna Kingsford and a member of the Hermetic Society in the mid-1880s, and joined Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society.¹¹ Westcott was steeped in the study of Western Hermeticism, especially the Cabala, and began to publish on occult subjects during the 1880s. By the early 1890s he was publishing papers and articles on the Cabala in the Theosophical journal *Lucifer*, and went on to publish a nine-volume *Collectanea Hermetica* series (1893–96) to which two members of the Golden Dawn contributed.¹² A friendly and tolerant man, Westcott was regarded affectionately in his new Hermetic Order.

MacGregor Mathers was an altogether different proposition. He was a younger man from a more obscure background, and was passionately drawn to all things military and Celtic as well as occult. By the time he arrived in London in the 1880s MacGregor Mathers had already adopted the aristocratic title of the Comte de Glenstrae, claiming that an ancestor had been so created after the 1745 Jacobite rebellion by Louis XV; this foreshadowed the increasingly autocratic leanings that were later to cause so much trouble in the Golden Dawn. In fact, MacGregor Mathers was born Samuel Liddell Mathers (the MacGregor was also an addition) in Hackney, London, in 1854. He attended Bedford Grammar School and lived what was probably a threadbare existence with his widowed mother in Bournemouth until

her death in 1885. By the mid-1880s MacGregor Mathers was moving in occult circles in London, where he was already a member of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia. He met the occultist Kenneth Mackenzie and was involved with Anna Kingsford's Hermetic Society. Like Westcott, he gave papers at the Hermetic Society and was probably responsible for introducing Kingsford to the study of practical magic. When MacGregor Mathers published his translation of Knorr von Rosenroth's 1677 work *Kabbala Denudata* in 1887, the book that established his reputation as an occultist, he dedicated it to the authors of *The Perfect Way* (Kingsford and Maitland).¹³ His wife later noted that MacGregor Mathers declined Madame Blavatsky's offer of involvement in the formation of the Theosophical Society because he was "more in sympathy with Anna Kingsford's ideals of esoteric Christianity and of the advancement of woman."¹⁴ It is possible that MacGregor Mathers avoided the Theosophical Society because Anna Kingsford's connection with it had been unhappy, but it is also clear that he preferred the occultism of the Western Hermetic tradition. Always impecunious, he received financial help from Westcott (or so the latter claimed), and later a leading member of the Golden Dawn, Annie Horniman, which enabled him to pursue his studies in the Reading Room of the British Museum. His wide occult learning was manifest in the rituals he wrote for the Golden Dawn and the numerous teaching documents that he wrote and circulated within the Order. MacGregor Mathers published several books on occult subjects, and his *Kabbala Denudata* remains influential in occult circles.¹⁵

The way in which the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was conceived, organized, and run reflected the Masonic background and Cabalistic interests of its cofounders. The Order was devised along Masonic lines and organized around the strictly hierarchical structure of ten numbered grades. These grades corresponded almost exactly with the Masonic grades of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia. To the nine existing grades of the Soc. Ros. was added a tenth, that of Ipsissimus, bringing the total of numbered grades in the Order in line with the symbolism of the Cabala. The Golden Dawn grades numbering from 1 to 10 were associated with the ten Sephiroth (or Emanations of the Deity) of the Cabalistic Tree of Life. The beginning grade of Neophyte was also added, but this received the numerical value of 0. The Golden Dawn also followed the Soc. Ros.'s example of dividing the grades into three Orders, so that the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in fact consisted of three Orders: the First (or Outer) Order, the Second (or Inner) Order, and a Third Order. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was therefore constituted as follows:

FIRST ORDER

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Numerical Symbol</i>
Neophyte	0°=0°
Zelator	1°=10°
Theoricus	2°=9°
Practicus	3°=8°
Philosophus	4°=7°

SECOND ORDER

Adeptus Minor	5°=6°
Adeptus Major	6°=5°
Adeptus Exemptus	7°=4°

THIRD ORDER

Magister Templi	8°=3°
Magus	9°=2°
Ipsissimus	10°=1°

As in craft Freemasonry, a new member of the Golden Dawn was initiated first into the lowest (in this case the Neophyte) grade and worked up the ladder of seniority. From the outset, however, Westcott, MacGregor Mathers, and Woodman assumed their roles as the three visible “Chiefs” of the First Order, and in this capacity took the honorary senior grade of Adeptus Minor 5° = 6°. In common with Soc. Ros. practice and that of all subsequent Golden Dawn initiates, they also assumed the individual mottoes by which they were to be known within the First Order. Thus Westcott became *Sapere Aude* [Dare to be wise], MacGregor Mathers assumed his Scots-Gaelic Soc. Ros. motto of *’S Rioghal (or Rioghail) Mo Dhream* [Royal is my tribe], and Woodman used *Magna Est Veritas Et Praevalebit* [Great is the truth and it shall prevail].

Less obviously, and using different mottoes, the three men also assumed the exalted 7° = 4° grade of the Second Order with the express purpose of issuing teachings and making executive decisions anonymously on behalf of the “Secret Chiefs.”¹⁶ The concept of hidden or “Secret Chiefs” was inherited directly from the kind of occult Freemasonry promulgated in the Soc. Ros. in England and Martinist Orders in France, and was in effect similar to the idea of the mysterious “Mahatmas” of the Theosophical Society. During the early years of the hierarchical Golden Dawn, then, before the Sec-

ond Order became operational in its own right, the actual identities of the three high-ranking $7^{\circ} = 4^{\circ}$ Adepts were not known. Even when initiates entered the Second Order and realized, for example, that Sapere Aude of the First Order and Non Omnia Moriar of the Second were one and the same, it remained generally understood that Westcott and MacGregor Mathers were in touch with and spoke on behalf of the discarnate Secret Chiefs of the exalted Third Order. The Third Order was thus reserved for the elusive Secret Chiefs of occult tradition, and within the Golden Dawn it was accepted that it was rarely (if ever) accessible to a mere mortal. In practice, therefore, the grade of Adeptus Exemptus $7^{\circ} = 4^{\circ}$ in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was the highest to which a man or woman might reasonably aspire.¹⁷

The kind of occultism to which initiates were introduced in the Golden Dawn was broad in scope but also quite specific in nature. It was Rosicrucian in orientation, but there was neither precedent for nor contemporary rival to the kind of teaching and training offered by the Order. The remarkable achievement of MacGregor Mathers and, to a lesser extent, Westcott was that they brought together a vast array of occult material and synthesized it into a coherent and teachable system. In this respect the Golden Dawn was absolutely unique, and today countless occult organizations claim kinship with this extraordinary Victorian creation. Every member of the Order was given careful and systematic instruction in the “hidden” or “rejected” knowledge of the Western Hermetic tradition. Initiates studied the symbolism of astrology, alchemy, and the Cabala, were instructed in geomantic and tarot divination, and introduced to very basic magical concepts and signs. The Order drew heavily on the “Egyptian” writings of Hermes Trismegistus, and Cabalism (said to derive from Egypt through the teachings of Moses) was central to Golden Dawn symbolism and further elaborated in its version of Rosicrucianism. The legendary Christian Rosencreutz had visited Egypt, and the original cypher manuscript used to establish the provenance of the Golden Dawn contained references to ancient Egyptian texts. Neophytes were taught that Rosicrucianism is dependent in part on ancient Egyptian magic, and MacGregor Mathers apparently drew upon mid-Victorian scholarship in Egyptology for the initial Neophyte ritual.¹⁸ Members of the Second Order understood the methods of ancient Egyptian magic and were knowledgeable about the magical import of the Egyptian gods. It was in the Second Order, too, that the Rosicrucian theme was made more explicit. The Second Order had a different, specifically Rosicrucian name, *Ordo Roseae Rubeae et Aureae Crucis* [The red rose and the cross of gold],

and the finale of its impressive $5^{\circ} = 6^{\circ}$ ritual was based on the legend of Christian Rosencreutz.¹⁹

Authority in the Golden Dawn was vested in leading individuals. The three Chiefs, Westcott, MacGregor Mathers, and Woodman, initially assumed the senior offices of Hierophant, Hieres, and Hegemon (akin to the Worshipful Master, Senior Warden, and Junior Warden of Masonic organization), and appointed further Officers of the Temple who performed leading ceremonial roles. The names of the offices were derived from ancient Greek. The title of Hierophant was taken from the head of the ancient Eleusinian cult, and within the Golden Dawn the Hierophant assumed corresponding status. The Hieres in the Golden Dawn was “the Expounder of the Mysteries,” and the Hegemon oversaw the preparation of candidates as they approached their highly ritualized initiation into the Neophyte and then subsequent grades. The unifying theme of these entry rituals was the progression of a candidate from darkness into the light of true spirituality and wisdom, and the rituals themselves were undertaken in a spirit of solemn reverence by suitably robed candidates and Officers of the Temple. The entry ritual was the first encounter a candidate had with a grade, and appropriate instruction in the “knowledge” associated with that grade then followed. In the Golden Dawn a senior Adept was held responsible for overseeing the quality of instruction, but in general those in the higher ranks were responsible for teaching those in the lower. A student progressed through the grades of the Order by means of a series of examinations, but admission to the Second Order was selective—a privilege rather than a right. Members of the First Order (often referred to as the Golden Dawn in the Outer) had to be proficient in alchemical and astrological symbolism, know the Hebrew alphabet, understand the basic significance and attributions of the Cabalistic Tree of Life, and be familiar with the symbolic import of divinatory systems like the tarot. They were also taught elementary magical signs, although tuition in magic was restricted to members of the Second (or Inner) Order. By the time candidates had completed the five grades of the First Order they had a general understanding of what was meant by Hermeticism, and why the Order to which they belonged was deemed to be a Hermetic Society.²⁰

In many respects, the Golden Dawn was part of an intimate and closely knit world. Applicants for admission were vetted, but many already knew each other by sight, name, or reputation. Many of the early initiates were still in their twenties or thirties, and it was often word of mouth and the encouragement of like-minded friends that accounted for interest in member-

ship. Freemasonry and the Soc. Ros. often supplied male candidates for the Golden Dawn, and the Theosophical Society was an important proving ground for both sexes. The Irish poet and playwright W. B. Yeats, for example, came to the Golden Dawn in his early twenties by way of experiments with spiritualism and involvement with the Dublin Hermetic Society (from 1886 the Dublin Theosophical Society) and the Theosophical Society in London. The young Yeats had been introduced to A. P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* by his aunt, Isabella Pollexfen Varley, was deeply impressed by Mohini Chatterji when the latter visited Dublin in 1886, became caught up in the local craze for all things Indian, and went on to join the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society shortly after moving to London in 1887. Indeed, Yeats was one of those within the Theosophical Society who were agitating for more precise occult instruction during this period. In 1888, within a few months of the Golden Dawn admitting its first members, Madame Blavatsky established her secret "inner" Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society with a view to preparing a select group for advanced knowledge. Yeats joined the Esoteric Section in December 1888 and, although he was skeptical about Blavatsky's Mahatmas, saw this inner circle as a place where the authenticity of practical occultism might be verified. Blavatsky, on the other hand, while prepared to teach the principles of magic, was concerned that magical practice could easily slide into participation in the black arts. The upshot was that Yeats sought and gained entrance to the Golden Dawn in March 1890, and in October of the same year regretfully agreed to resign from the Esoteric Section on account of his unacceptable partiality for practical magic.²¹

In spite of Blavatsky's reservations about members of the Esoteric Section having other occult allegiances, membership overlapped significantly between the Theosophical Society's inner sanctum and the Golden Dawn. Several important members of the Golden Dawn were involved with the Esoteric Section, including William Wynn Westcott and the elderly Reverend W. A. Ayton, one of the first initiates of the Order. Similarly, several of Yeats's friends in Bedford Park, the area of Chiswick in West London where he lived during this period, became involved with both advanced Theosophy and the Golden Dawn. Bedford Park during the early 1890s was a quiet, leafy suburb that, like other outlying areas of London before the turn of the century, retained the flavor of a self-contained village. It was in fact only about thirty minutes by underground train to central London, but it boasted spacious, inexpensive houses designed in the vernacular style and placed along winding, tree-lined streets. It was home to a collection of journalists, academics, and bohemian artists and writers who felt fiercely loyal to their

“colony” and supported it with a variety of artistic and cooperative ventures. Bedford Park exuded a genteel if faintly shabby aestheticism that accorded well with the impoverished Yeats household, and proved hospitable to experimental theatre, the kinds of arts and crafts being promoted by William Morris in nearby Hammersmith, ethical socialism, and occultism. Some of the Bedford Park inhabitants (including Yeats) were instrumental in establishing the Chiswick Lodge of the Theosophical Society in 1891, and a close-knit group of friends and associates was similarly involved with the Golden Dawn.²² Dr. John Todhunter, a leading member of the Bedford Park set, was introduced to the Golden Dawn by the actress Florence Farr, who entered the Order in July 1890. Todhunter was a family friend of the Yeateses who gave up medicine to become a poet, dramatist, and man of letters; and he was involved artistically with Yeats, Farr, and another member of the group, the artist Henry Marriott Paget.²³ Florence Farr’s sister, Henrietta, was married to Henry Paget, and was herself initiated into the Golden Dawn in March 1892. This kind of intimate connection was typical of the networks that operated within occult organizations like the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.²⁴

The majority of Golden Dawn initiates were drawn, with some exceptions (MacGregor Mathers being the most notable), from the comfortable middle classes. Political affiliations ran the gamut of possibilities, from the aristocratic pretensions and martial leanings of MacGregor Mathers to the socialist interests of Florence Farr, but political differences could be subsumed (as in the case of Mathers and Farr) in shared occult goals and priorities. Initiates such as those from the Bedford Park group included men and women from the world of arts and letters who moved in generally progressive circles, but others from backgrounds of small business and finance were sometimes more conservative by temperament if not also political persuasion. Among the professions the church was represented, as were law and medicine. Healing was one of the traditional arts of Rosicrucian legend, and some of the physicians in the Order practiced “alternative” medicine, such as homeopathy.²⁵ There were fourteen doctors in the Golden Dawn prior to 1900, and of these Westcott and Woodman were its cofounders while Dr. Edward Berridge, Dr. Henry Pullen Burry, and Dr. Robert William Felkin assumed positions of importance.

Several initiates were professional writers. W. B. Yeats was pursuing his early literary career when he first entered the Order, A. E. Waite was already known as a writer on occult topics when he joined in 1891, and Edith Bland (who wrote children’s stories under the name of E. Nesbit) also was a member. Two minor authors, Violet Tweedale and J. H. Fitzgerald Molloy, were

initiated during the early years, and Algernon Blackwood and Arthur Machen, writers of altogether more substantial reputation, entered the Order more than a decade after it first opened its doors. Of these, A. E. Waite was to play a major role in the reconfiguration of the Golden Dawn during the early years of the new century. Although temperamentally different from the autocratic MacGregor Mathers, Waite shared a somewhat shadowy class background. He was born in the United States, brought up in England by a widowed mother, and received only erratic schooling. He worked in journalism and publishing, translated Eliphas Lévi's works into English, and wrote exhaustively (and, many still think, with great erudition) on occultism and Christian mysticism. Although Waite often irritated his fellow *fratres* and *sorores* in the Golden Dawn with his pedantry, many initiates chose to follow him when he emerged as a contender for the leadership of the Order after its splintering.²⁶

Like the Theosophical Society, and following the lead of the originary cypher manuscript, the Golden Dawn welcomed women "*sorores*" to its ranks. Rumors about the existence "of a very ancient universal Rosicrucian Society, composed of students of both sexes" first began to circulate during 1888, the year in which the Isis-Urania (London), Osiris (Weston-super-Mare), and Horus (Bradford) Temples of the Golden Dawn started to recruit members.²⁷ The London Temple always had the highest overall membership, but women were well represented throughout the Order. Isis-Urania initiated 32 individuals in its first year, of which 9 were women. Within the next two years a further 28 persons were admitted, 15 of whom were women. During 1891 and 1892 Isis-Urania initiated 45 new adherents, of which a little over half were women. By 1893, when the Amen-Ra Temple in Edinburgh became operational, over 180 individuals had entered the Order and the total number of active initiates (allowing for resignations, deaths, and so on) was about 124. During its first eight years of existence the Golden Dawn initiated 315 men and women, with women constituting just over one-third of total membership.²⁸ Among the first women to join were Mina Bergson, sister of the philosopher Henri Bergson and later to become Mrs. MacGregor Mathers; Alexandrina Mackenzie, Kenneth Mackenzie's widow; and Anne Ayton, wife of the Reverend W. A. Ayton.²⁹ All three had close associations through husbands and friends with the Soc. Ros. and other occult groups. Other early initiates such as Isabelle de Steiger were already active in their own right in occult circles, and were acquainted with the likes of Anna Kingsford and Madame Blavatsky. Similarly, Constance Mary Wilde, the young wife of Oscar Wilde, had already been involved with spiritualism and (like Oscar's brother, Willie) the Theosophical Society

when she entered the Golden Dawn in 1888. She had climbed to the top of the First Order by the end of the following year, but subsequently allowed her membership to lapse. Both she and her husband were known to W. B. Yeats, who recorded that he first met his famous fellow countryman in 1888 and professed himself delighted by Wilde's "pretty wife and children."³⁰

Yeats was responsible for introducing two of its best-known women into the Golden Dawn. These were the actress Florence Farr and Maud Gonne, the fervent Irish patriot with whom Yeats was unrequitedly in love. Maud Gonne's involvement with the Order (but not with magic) was short lived. She had a visionary gift that both inspired and frightened her, but she was unimpressed by the prosaic appearance of the Golden Dawn's robed initiates and suspicious of the Order's connections with Freemasonry, which she associated with a repressive British establishment. Florence Farr, on the other hand, had a great aptitude for magic and was deeply committed to both occultism and the Golden Dawn. W. B. Yeats, Florence Farr, and a third woman, Annie Horniman, were each admitted to the Order in 1890, all three were to be connected professionally through their involvement with the theatre, and each became prominent within the Golden Dawn. Annie Horniman was introduced to MacGregor Mathers and thus the Golden Dawn through her close friend, Mina Bergson. The two women had met when they were students at the Slade School of Fine Art in London during the 1880s. Annie Horniman persuaded her father, Frederick, to employ MacGregor Mathers as curator of his small private museum at Forest Hill, London, and thus make it possible for MacGregor Mathers to marry Mina Bergson in 1890. The job lasted only about a year, but Annie Horniman was to remain heavily financially responsible for the MacGregor Matherses for another decade. Influenced by MacGregor Mathers, Mina changed her name to the more suitably Celtic "Moina," and under his tutelage she discovered a powerful gift for visionary experiences and magic. After her marriage Moina MacGregor Mathers became something akin to muse and high priestess of the Golden Dawn, and was closely involved with her husband in the development of the Order's rituals and teachings. During the 1890s Moina Mathers, Annie Horniman, and Florence Farr were the three most important and powerful women in the Golden Dawn.

Annie Horniman and Florence Farr were both in their thirtieth year when they entered the Order. They were women of independent (if limited, in the case of Florence Farr) means, with the time, inclination, and resources with which to pursue their interests. Annie Elizabeth Fredericka Horniman (1860–1937) was a member of a family whose money had been made in a well-known tea importing business. Her father was an avid collector of what

had earlier been termed “curiosities,” which he bought from the likes of the explorer Richard Burton, and his collection was significant enough to warrant exhibition. His daughter received a respectable allowance, but in 1893 Annie Horniman inherited sufficient money from her grandfather to enable her to support the impecunious MacGregor Matherses, provide the financial backing for an 1894 season of plays starring Florence Farr (and involving Yeats, Todhunter, and George Bernard Shaw), and go on to become a patron of Yeats and Lady Gregory’s Irish Theatre. It was Annie Horniman’s money that in 1904 bought the Dublin building that became the famous Abbey Theatre, and her generosity that provided the theatre’s annual subsidy. She was subsequently to become a most effective owner-manager when she took over the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester. It was perhaps this love of theatre that provided an initial bond with Florence Farr as well as one of the more obvious explanations for her attraction to the Golden Dawn, which was intensely theatrical in its ceremonial aspect. Although the two women were temperamentally very different—Horniman was inclined to be punctilious and overbearing, while Farr could be irritatingly careless and vague—they were both fiercely independent and united in their attention to the finer points of the performance of the Order’s rituals. Florence Farr and Annie Horniman reached the exalted positions respectively of *Praemonstratrix* and *Sub-Praemonstratrix* in the Golden Dawn, and as such were its principal instructors in ritual.³¹

Florence Farr (1860–1917) was the daughter of William Farr, a medical man and self-taught statistician whose work as a Compiler of Abstracts for the Registrar General Office at Somerset House earned him plaudits and an international reputation. Florence Farr was educated at the Cheltenham Ladies’ College in Gloucestershire and later at Queen’s College, the first college for women in London. Although intelligent, she had little inclination for conventional examinations and left Queen’s in 1880 without preparing for the external degree of the University of London. Instead she became a pupil of the actor-manager J. L. Toole and began to perform on the professional stage. Her father died in 1883, leaving Farr in possession of fifty pounds a year, just enough to support a very modest lifestyle. The following year she married a young actor, Edward Emery, but quickly discovered that the married state was not to her liking. When her husband emigrated to America in 1888 she chose not to follow him, and they were divorced in the mid-1890s. Farr retained “advanced” views on women, marriage, and sexual mores all her life. By 1890, the year in which she entered the Golden Dawn, she was living the kind of independent existence she so valued. She was established with the artistic Bedford Park set, mixing with the socialists

who moved in William Morris's circle, and had struck up associations with both Yeats and George Bernard Shaw. Farr had a languid, tranquil beauty and a beautiful, harmonious speaking voice that made her deeply attractive to men. It is not clear if Yeats and Farr became lovers at this point, but Shaw fell in love with her and they had an affair during the earlier 1890s.³² Shaw took a great interest in Farr's acting career but was impatient with her apparently casual attitude towards improving her stagecraft. He coached her for the leading role of Rebecca West in the London debut of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* in 1891 and oversaw her further association with "the new drama" in the 1890s, but finally ran out of patience with what he saw as her dilettantism. Indeed, Florence Farr remained a minor figure on the professional stage.³³

The casual way in which Farr approached her stage career and the contrast afforded by her devotion to occultism exasperated Shaw, and he made no secret of his irritation with what he regarded as "the persistent foolishness" of her occult "dreams." He was particularly exercised by what he saw as Farr's harebrained schemes to popularize mystical religion and occult ideas. In this connection he was later to urge her not to "be misled by sloppy-minded [sic] lunatics; if you want to write popular books, write them: if you want to write mystic gospels, write them; but in the name of common sense dont [sic] try to popularise your mysticism or to mystify your popular readers." Shaw, who regarded the mystical element in Farr's life as diversionary and tortuous, told her, "If preachee, preachee: if floggee, floggee; but no preachee floggee too."³⁴ In general she respected this advice but still found it difficult even in her "popular" writing to avoid dealing with the occult themes that were so central to her life.

W. B. Yeats perhaps understood in a way that Shaw could not what motivated Farr and where her true vocation lay. Yeats and Farr were later to become lovers and collaborate in a series of theatrical and artistic ventures, some of which highlighted Farr's musical voice and her feel for the rhythm of the spoken word. These qualities were invaluable within the Golden Dawn, and particularly in her official capacity as Praemonstratrix, Farr sought to raise the level of ceremony and ritual intonation to an art. Certainly Florence Farr took her role in the Golden Dawn and its concomitant responsibilities extremely seriously, and within the Order she gave of herself completely.

Yeats remembered Farr during her Golden Dawn years of the 1890s, dressing "without care or calculation as if to hide her beauty," living in lodgings just West of Bedford Park where the sitting room became "a reflection of her mind, the walls covered with musical instruments, pieces of Oriental

drapery, and Egyptian gods and goddesses painted by herself in the British Museum.”³⁵ She spent a great deal of her time in the British Museum and its Reading Room immersed in esoteric studies, taught and lectured in both Orders of the Golden Dawn, visited its premises frequently, officiated in various capacities in rituals and ceremonies, was occupied with practical magic, and was busy writing. In the summer of 1893 Farr was writing a novel, *The Dancing Faun*, but she was also working on the first of her occult publications. This, *A Short Enquiry Concerning the Hermetic Art* by a Lover of Philaethes, was a reprint of an eighteenth-century alchemical tract for which she provided the notes and an introduction. It appeared in 1894 as volume 3 of William Wynn Westcott’s *Collectanea Hermetica* series, and conveys something of both her personal philosophy and magical training. In her introduction Farr states that “[t]he man whose curiosity carries him from the contemplation of the manifestation to the contemplation of its causes, is the man whose instincts are preparing him to undertake the Great Work,” which suggests that she considered an instinctively questioning nature and the desire to understand the great forces at work in the universe fundamental to the success of the magical enterprise.³⁶ And if Farr sought her answers principally in the theory and practice of occultism, she cast her net widely. Shaw said of her, “it is impossible to mention anything she does not know”; and this bears out the general impression of Florence Farr as a clever woman, driven by curiosity, always in search of more knowledge, further insight.³⁷

Farr’s questing temperament was common to other senior members of the Golden Dawn. Isabelle de Steiger, an outwardly conventional woman whose occultism was central to her life, noted: “I have not merely, as might be surmised, gone from one subject to another, from frivolity of soul, but because I have truly and seriously given the best of my powers to learn to know for what purpose I came into this world, and in what condition I shall leave it.”³⁸ It was this kind of questioning that drew women and men alike into occultism, and occultism alone that seemed to them to offer the synthesized answers that religion, science, and philosophy in isolation could not provide. Moina MacGregor Mathers, writing several years after her husband’s death in 1918, reflected on the relevance of the Cabala and of the magical tradition:

Religion has its word, Science its promises and demonstrations, philosophy its systematized theories, art its creations and ideals, and yet these in their fundamental separations fall short of that Synthetical ideal which the Spirit of Humanity unceasingly demands. There remains always that perpetual cry of humanity, that plaint of a world in pain demanding apparently in vain some

solution to the problem of existence. The answer of the ancient world to this cry of the Spirit of Humanity is to be found in the establishment of the Mysteries, as containing in their penetralia that which even the highest then known forms of religion had not, namely, a philosophico-religious reply resumed in Formulas and Ceremonies, to the problems of Life and Death, of Nature, of the Gods, of Spiritual Beings, etc., and lastly of the linking of these things as a whole back to the First Cause of all things.³⁹

It was precisely this longing for spiritualized answers to life's deepest questions combined with the millennialism of the fin de siècle that brought people into the Theosophical Society and the Golden Dawn. Once there, those like Florence Farr and W. B. Yeats became totally absorbed in occult study and the intense concentration on the inner life that advanced occultism required. Prior to gaining admittance to the Golden Dawn in 1890, Yeats had, of course, already had considerable exposure to occultism. He was well versed in occult ideas through his Theosophical associations, had read MacGregor Mathers's translation of the *Kabbala Denudata*, and at the end of the 1880s was buried in his study of William Blake. Blake was widely admired within the Bedford Park set, but Yeats was beginning to weave the ideas of Emanuel Swedenborg, Jacob Boehme, and Blake together in a conceptual framework that underscored the power of the poet's mystical ideas and their relationship to the symbolic world of occultism and magic. Yeats was also deeply immersed in the Irish folklore that was so central to his literary output during this period, and that, too, was to be incorporated into his developing sense of the power of the imagination as central to the magical enterprise.⁴⁰ As his knowledge of magic deepened it became bound up with every area of Yeats's working life. Yeats himself remarked, "If I had not made magic my constant study I could not have written a single word of my Blake book, nor would *The Countess Kathleen* have ever come to exist." Like so many who became involved with occultism, he readily acknowledged that the "mystical life is the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write."⁴¹

It is possible that Yeats had attended some of the meetings of the Hermetic Society when he first arrived in London, and it might have been there that he first met Samuel MacGregor Mathers. He certainly ran into MacGregor Mathers in the Reading Room of the British Museum in the late 1880s, recalling many years later: "I often saw a man of thirty-six or thirty-seven, in a brown velveteen coat, with a gaunt resolute face, and an athletic body, who seemed, before I heard his name, or knew the nature of his studies, a figure of romance."⁴² A. E. Waite had encountered MacGregor Math-

ers in the British Museum during the early 1880s when MacGregor Mathers was leading a poverty-stricken existence and was immersed in the occult studies that were to bear fruit in the rituals and teachings of the Golden Dawn. The two men had obviously struck up a conversation about the “mystical” subjects that absorbed them both because Waite remembered that MacGregor Mathers “said to me in a hushed voice and with a somewhat awful accent: ‘I am a Rosicrucian and a Freemason; therefore I can speak of some things, but of others I cannot speak.’” On another occasion MacGregor Mathers confided, “I have clothed myself with hieroglyphics as with a garment,” and Waite concluded from this that MacGregor Mathers “was then deep in Egyptology.”⁴³ Waite claimed that MacGregor Mathers’s “mystery-language” and attempts at glamorous association failed to impress him, but he nevertheless sought entry to the Golden Dawn. Although Yeats was later to say that “Mathers had much learning, but little scholarship,” a sentiment echoed by Waite, this “figure of romance” clearly had a great deal of personal charisma and was to exert enormous influence over the initiates of the newly formed Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.⁴⁴

MacGregor Mathers, with his adopted Scottish nomenclature and title of Comte de Glenstrae, established a tone within the Golden Dawn that was intensely sympathetic to all things Celtic. His own fascination with Scotland was echoed within the Order by the youthful Aleister Crowley, later to become infamous as a “black” magician, who similarly created for himself a fictitious Scottish identity (one of many) and shared MacGregor Mathers’s romantic longing for a suitably aristocratic pedigree. But forceful “Jacobite” opinions and imagined claims to Scottish ancestry were only one aspect of the Golden Dawn’s Celtic inclinations. There was also Irish (or, more accurately, Irish Protestant Ascendancy) representation within the Order, most notably in the person of W. B. Yeats but equally evident in other figures such as Yeats’s friend Dorothea Hunter. Hunter was a member of the Butler family and came from the same gentrified Irish Protestant background as Yeats. A Theosophist and Bedford Park neighbor, Yeats recruited her into the Golden Dawn and both she and her husband, Edmund, became important members of a group interested in developing a specifically Celtic spirituality.⁴⁵

Yeats conceived of this Celtic Mystical Order as a means of transcending Irish nationalist politics and divisions, although it was certainly designed to appeal to Maud Gonne, and worked with initiates including Florence Farr and MacGregor Mathers to establish the necessary rites. The proposed Celtic Mystical Order was part of Yeats’s much broader engagement with Irish literature and culture at the turn of the century, and represented the

idea urged by his old friend George W. Russell (the writer “AE”) for a new Celtic spirituality worthy of the approaching century.⁴⁶ Plans for a Celtic Order took place, however, against the backdrop of a significant range of possible political positions, from fervent republican sentiments to a more measured Home Rule stance. Many of those active in the occult world had Irish nationalist sympathies, including Annie Besant—also, like Yeats, from a shabbily genteel Anglo-Irish background—whose attitude towards Indian independence was increasingly affected by the Irish situation. This Celtic strain therefore ran deep in the occultism of the fin de siècle, and had ramifications beyond the posturing of MacGregor Mathers. Nevertheless, MacGregor Mathers’s Celtic allegiances were another factor in his hold on the imagination of initiates of the Golden Dawn.

In 1890, when Yeats, Florence Farr, and Annie Horniman were initiated into the Golden Dawn as respectively *Demon Est Deus Inversus* [The devil is the converse of God], *Sapientia Sapienti Dono Data* [Wisdom is given to the wise as a gift], and *Fortiter et Recte* [Bravely and justly], the Isis-Urania Temple in London was holding its ceremonies in private homes and at the Mark Masons’ Hall in the Euston Road. There was as yet no operational Second Order to speak of and the 5° = 6° Adeptus Minor grade was an honorary mark of seniority bestowed on advanced members of the First Order who had passed the requisite examination. Candidates for admission to the First Order were asked to read and sign a few preliminary documents that gave some idea of the structure and purpose of the as-yet anonymous Order. They were informed that the Order frowned upon spiritualist mediumship, mesmerism, and any practice that encouraged a passive will, and thus learned indirectly that occultism (unlike spiritualism, which privileged “mind passivity” and the mediumistic trance) stressed the control of consciousness through the operation of the active will. Opposition to spiritualism was inherited directly from Blavatsky, but the Golden Dawn also followed A. P. Sinnett’s cue when he argued that “[o]ccult phenomena must not be confused with the phenomena of spiritualism. The latter, whatever they may be, are manifestations which mediums can neither control nor understand. The former are achievements of a conscious, living operator comprehending the laws with which he works.”⁴⁷ Advanced Golden Dawn initiates were later to be taught that the magical will “is king, not only of the House of Life, but of the universe outside the gates of sense,” and that the Adept is capable of conjuring a particular phenomenon with absolute precision through the operation of this all-important will.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, candidates for admission to the Order often came from spiritualist backgrounds, and in some cases continued their spiritualist experiments both during and after active mem-

bership. W. B. Yeats, for example, was drawn to spiritualist experimentation prior to his entry and subsequently became heavily involved with it in spite of the strictures of Blake, Swedenborg, Blavatsky, and the occultists in the Golden Dawn.⁴⁹ In a different vein, William Crookes, the scientist and Fellow of the Royal Society who carried out a famous series of experiments in the 1870s with the young spiritualist medium Florence Cook, was an active psychical researcher who was admitted to the Golden Dawn in 1890.⁵⁰

All candidates were required to sign a Pledge Form, which committed them to complete silence about everything relating to the Order. They were also asked to select the motto (usually in Latin) by which they would be known. These mottoes became the sole means of address in anything relating to the Order, and were often affectionately shortened for everyday use. Annie Horniman, for instance, was known among the membership as “Fortiter,” while Yeats was often dubbed (lovingly or otherwise) “Demon.” Initials were also common, particularly when referring to a long motto/name in writing. Hence Florence Farr usually became “S. S. D. D.” in letters, and used these initials in her own occult missives and publications. The impressive Neophyte ritual that duly marked a candidate’s initiation into the Golden Dawn emphasized that the Order was dedicated to the study of occultism, and played out ceremonially the theme of the candidate’s journey from darkness into light. For the ceremony, as for all Golden Dawn initiations and rituals, the candidate was appropriately robed—in this case, in the black gown and red shoes of the Neophyte grade. Here, too, the initiate was taught the secret signs and “grip” of the grade, the means by which the initiated Neophyte might identify himself or herself to others. Secrecy and silence on matters relating to the Order were emphasized, and the symbolism of dress and ritual accoutrements explained. Thus, during the initiation ceremony, the presiding Hierophant told the candidate: “The Three-Fold Cord bound around your waist, was an image of the three-fold bondage of Mortality, which amongst the Initiated is called earthly or material inclination, that has bound into a narrow place the once far-wandering soul.” Similarly, “the Hood-wink was an image of the Darkness, of Ignorance, of Mortality that has blinded men to the Happiness and Beauty their eyes once looked upon.”⁵¹ Thereafter, as they rose through the grades, initiates wore the appropriate distinguishing marks of rank and office, and participated in the rituals to which their grade entitled them. Finally, any member of the Golden Dawn who became a nominal 5° = 6°, the pinnacle of advancement during the earlier years, was qualified to preside over First Order gatherings and wear the distinctive white sash of the Adeptus Minor.

All this, and indeed the history of the Golden Dawn, was to change in

1892, when MacGregor Mathers single-handedly instituted the Ordo Roseae Rubrae et Aureae Crucis (R. R. et A. C.) as a selective and active Second Order dedicated to the training of magicians. This Order, created after MacGregor Mathers apparently returned from a trip to Paris bearing an authorized $5^{\circ} = 6^{\circ}$ ritual supplied by “a Frater L. E. T., a Continental Adept,” constituted a secret elite within a secret elite.⁵² The honorary or nominal $5^{\circ} = 6^{\circ}$ remained in place, but these initiates knew nothing of the R. R. et A. C., which now assumed all rights and functions of a Second Order within the Golden Dawn. Only selected candidates were invited to take part in a new ceremony devised by MacGregor Mathers and known as the Portal ritual, which bridged the First and Second Orders; these women and men were then admitted to the R. R. et A. C. via the supposedly recently acquired and distinctively Rosicrucian $5^{\circ} = 6^{\circ}$ Adeptus Minor ritual. This ritual, along with the entire concept and organization of the R. R. et A. C., was undoubtedly MacGregor Mathers’s creation. The ritual itself drew heavily on the Christian Rosencreutz legend and culminated with the candidate coming face to face with a symbolic representation of “Father R. C.” as he lay in his coffin (or Pastos) in a secret tomb. This tomb, referred to as a Vault and described in detail in the seventeenth-century Rosicrucian pamphlet known as the *Fama*, was the centerpiece for the Second Order’s Adeptus Minor ritual. A replica tomb, known in the Order as the Vault of the Adepts, was constructed according to MacGregor Mathers’s specifications and decorated by his artistic wife, Moina MacGregor Mathers, and himself. The Vault was a seven-sided chamber eight feet high, and its interior was adorned with a complex array of Cabalistic, astrological, and alchemical symbols, each painted in accordance with the symbolic importance accorded specific colors. The structure was large enough to accommodate the Pastos, the candidate, and at least three officiating Adepts, and was kept closed and sealed at the Second Order’s premises.⁵³

The Vault, the ritual for which it was designed, and everything else in the Second Order represented an extraordinary synthesis of occult knowledge, the powerful effects of a honed imagination, and a clear vision supported by strong organizational skills. It was MacGregor Mathers’s creation and he was initially its undisputed Chief, although others quickly assumed leading roles. As the Order progressed, an Adept Council responsible to the Chief oversaw the Order’s administration and general business. William Wynn Westcott was extremely important in the R. R. et A. C., although he took no credit for its establishment, and he and MacGregor Mathers took on much of the teaching in the Order. Teaching was often done by lecture to the assembled Adepts, and many of these lectures became enshrined in what were

known as Flying Rolls—manuscript documents that formed the basis for instruction. The first Flying Roll was issued in November 1892, and thirty-four of them appeared within the next two years. Moina MacGregor Mathers, Florence Farr, Dr. Berridge, and Percy Bullock, a solicitor and an important member of the Golden Dawn, also contributed to the Flying Rolls. Moina Mathers was particularly invaluable to her husband because she could often realize visually through meditation and visions what he had in mind for the Order's teachings and rituals.⁵⁴ Twelve members of the Golden Dawn, including Moina Mathers, the Reverend and Mrs. Ayton, Dr. Berridge, and Florence Farr, were already honorary $5^{\circ} = 6^{\circ}$'s when Annie Horniman was due for promotion, and it was probably Horniman who was the first to experience the new Adeptus Minor ritual in the Vault of the Adepts. Her advancement from the First Order did not take place until the end of 1891, by which time MacGregor Mathers had completed his plans for the Second Order. The vault itself was not quite finished, but Annie Horniman was about to leave the country and presumably anxious to experience a full-blown $5^{\circ} = 6^{\circ}$ ceremonial induction into the R. R. et A. C.. The Second Order got under way in earnest the following year.⁵⁵

From the outset, the Second Order met in separate premises from the rest of the initiates of the Golden Dawn. They first occupied premises at Thavies Inn, off Holborn Circus, in accommodations that might well have been rented from the Sanitary Wood Wool Company—a firm that supplied surgical dressings and one with which Westcott was involved. By the summer of 1892, however, a move to Clipstone Street, off Great Portland Street, had been negotiated. The new quarters were in a bustling, unprepossessing road occupied by small tradespeople and artisans, and were the scene of considerable activity during the early autumn. Second Order initiates worked to clean and prepare the rooms, the Vault was moved from Thavies Inn and resurrected, and a library of occult reading materials was established. By September the Vault had been consecrated, and ceremonial admissions to the Second Order in the new premises were under way. There were eighteen such admissions during the following year, and one of these was Yeats, who was initiated as a $5^{\circ} = 6^{\circ}$ in January 1893. He entered an Order that was already on its feet and had become relatively well established by the end of the same year. Initiates were in and out of the Clipstone premises regularly, reading, collecting, and returning books and Second Order materials for study; preparing their magical instruments; exploring and polishing techniques of divination; attending ceremonies and formal Assemblies; and (in the case of some of the women) cleaning the rooms. The women in particular enjoyed this informal contact, and it seems that Westcott made an inef-

fectual attempt to limit the use of the Order's rooms by the "Lady Students." In some respects the R. R. et A. C. did combine a social with a more esoteric function, and as in the First Order, there was a reassuring clublike feel to the informal proceedings. The ease and pleasure with which initiates might meet and greet each other at Clipstone Street, however, was not fundamentally what the Second Order was all about.⁵⁶

MacGregor Mathers's R. R. et A. C. was conceived as a uniquely ambitious Magical Order and one in which initiates would pursue an advanced curriculum of esoteric knowledge in a spirit of total dedication. Here, as in the First Order, MacGregor Mathers and others brought together a tremendous amount of disparate material and gave it coherence, direction, and purpose. The teachings built on the knowledge gained in the First Order and were predicated on the occult doctrine of correspondences, often summed up by the Hermetic insight "As above, so below." Anna Kingsford, Edward Maitland, and Madame Blavatsky had deemed the Hermetic doctrine of correspondences vitally important, but as elucidated within the Golden Dawn it was based on the Cabalistic idea that all things in the universe are interconnected and find expression in the symbolism of the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life is part of the Jewish esoteric tradition and represents a map of the universe as it was understood before the encroachments of modern Western science. Its symbolism was central to the Christian cabalistic emphasis of the First Order, and in general the Golden Dawn drew heavily on Christian D. Ginsburg's relatively recent interpretive treatise on the subject.⁵⁷ First Order initiates, then, had already mastered the idea of a universe suffused with a deity that manifests itself in ten spheres or Sephiroth, each representing a different world, quality, or entity, and connected by twenty-two paths. They had begun to learn the correspondences attributed to each Sephiroth—the god or mythical figure, gem, color, numerical value, and so on—as well as the associations given to the twenty-two connecting paths. Initiates knew, for example, that the paths were identified with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the twenty-two cards of the tarot's pictorial Greater Arcana, as well as with particular planets, signs of the zodiac, and elements like fire or water. This was the kind of complex and detailed learning that earned an initiate admission to the nominal 5° = 6° after ascending the grades of the First Order, and it was this knowledge that formed the basis for further study in the selective Second Order. The difference between the First and Second Orders, however, was that in the R. R. et A. C. the knowledge was extended and put to practical use. The cabalistic teachings of the First Order were now revealed to have practical facility as a system of operative magic. Initiates became magicians in the real sense of the word.

Magic as it was understood in the Second Order was based on the belief that an Adept can use a series of revered and ancient techniques in conjunction with a knowledge of correspondences in order to converse with those worlds beyond our own and gain control over the invisible forces of the universe. As it was taught in the Second Order, practical magic relied on the idea that the Cabalistic Tree of Life is emblematic of the structure of both the universe and each individual human being, and that the system of correspondences forges connections not merely between the different Sephiroth of the universe but also similarly between the different Sephiroth or inner worlds of the magician. Furthermore, the magical manipulation of correspondences allows for simultaneous effects in and between the macrocosmic Great World of the universe and the microcosmic Little World of the operator. This, members of the Second Order were taught, allows the magician to achieve incredible things. Indeed, Golden Dawn initiates already knew from personal experience that ceremonial ritual, the harmonious combination of sacred words or phrases with secret gestures and commands, could produce an extraordinary inner (psychological, emotional, or spiritual) change in the participant. They were now taught that when the appropriate magical formulae are intoned according to strict rules and with absolute dedication of purpose, the result can be powerful enough to effect particular sought-after changes in themselves and, correspondingly, other individuals and the worlds that make up the great cosmos. Given this, it is not surprising that the R. R. et A. C. screened its candidates with such care and emphasized that practical magic constitutes a sacred trust. It must never be used for personal gain or to do harm, as in so-called black magic. In the Second Order it was understood that magic requires a mastery of occult knowledge, perfect self-discipline, absolute precision of execution, and “Purity of aspiration and of life.”⁵⁸ These qualities were what was implied by the term *Adept*.

The Second Order taught its initiates the theory and practice of a particular kind of magic drawn from a variety of traditions, filtered through the lenses of medieval alchemy and Rosicrucianism, and anchored securely in the symbolism of the Cabala. Student Adepts were given a good theoretical grounding in practical magic and taught its major techniques, and advanced initiates were required to make and consecrate their own magical instruments. Initiates in the R. R. et A. C. wore a Rose Cross Lamén, which they constructed and painted—a badge designed in the form of a cross and decorated with occult symbols, at the center of which was a rose of twenty-two petals. Again, the references were fundamentally Cabalistic, but the Lamén symbolized the hidden powers of the great universal forces that the magi-

cian must command at will. Ultimately, it was representative of the great goal of the magical enterprise, the reconciliation of the human and divine.⁵⁹ Other indispensable implements were the Lotus Wand, one of four wands representing the magician's will and one that was preferably made of almond wood, decorated with bands of color symbolizing the signs of the zodiac, and topped by a lotus bloom that symbolized both natural and spiritual development; the Magic Sword, representing the magician's reason and indispensable for basic magical rituals or protection during more sophisticated undertakings; and the four Elemental Weapons, which include the Wand, Cup, Dagger, and Pentacle. Each of these represents one of the four natural elements and, as always, carried particular symbolic resonances. The robe traditionally worn by the magician represents the cloak of secrecy beneath which the operator works, and in the Second Order the color of the robe and details of an initiate's regalia reflected the degree to which the student had progressed in the attainments of the Adept.

Within two years of the establishment of the Second Order, MacGregor Mathers split the $5^{\circ} = 6^{\circ}$ Adeptus Minor grade into two subgrades: those of Zelator Adeptus Minor and the more senior Theoricus Adeptus Minor. A candidate for promotion to the latter, the Th. A. M. as it was known, had to pass a series of eight examinations based on a rigorous course of study that could take about two years to complete. By the time an initiate was admitted to the Th. A. M. grade, she already had an excellent grasp of the theory of magic and now progressed to the making and consecration of magical instruments. Not all senior $5^{\circ} = 6^{\circ}$ s, however, were particularly keen on practical magic, and some were much more interested in the advanced esoteric knowledge that underpinned magical practice. This later became a divisive issue within the Second Order, as did the fact that only Moina MacGregor Mathers was permitted to proceed beyond the two Adeptus Minor grades to admission to the $6^{\circ} = 5^{\circ}$ grade of Adeptus Major. Although MacGregor Mathers had plans for instituting a yet higher Adeptus Minor grade, nothing appears to have been finalized, and some senior initiates were frustrated by what they took to be a deliberate bar on their progress. Nevertheless, during the mid-1890s the Th. A. M.'s were busy enough. As they quickly discovered, ceremonial magic requires detailed preparation both of person and implements and the designated procedures were complex and time consuming.⁶⁰ Those who actively sought advancement in the performance of practical magic were engaged in the making of talismans (fetishes charged with magical power) appropriate to particular needs, perfecting ceremonial procedures, and working to attain the powerful concentrated will of the magician. And this was not all. Crucially, the Second Order emphasized that the ways

and means of practical magic were not to be regarded as ends in themselves but as staging posts in a long and single-minded journey towards individual perfection.

Both Orders of the Golden Dawn drew on the Hermetic notion of the Great Man, the spiritually perfected individual who exemplifies the pinnacle of human development and mirrors the glories of divinity. As Moina MacGregor Mathers later described it, the “object of the establishment of this school [the Golden Dawn] was similar to that of the foundation in ancient times of centres for the Celebration of the Mysteries.” She further elaborated that the Order was dedicated to “the study of the intelligent forces behind Nature, the Constitution of man and his relation to God,” and that it trained its initiates in the “simultaneous development of the soul, mind and body” as a way of approaching what it means to be most fully human.⁶¹

It was in the Second Order, however, that the idea of the magical Adept as the fullest possible expression of human perfection came to the fore, and much of its teaching and thaumaturgic activity were aimed at raising the initiate into a state of exalted perfection. To be sure, the R. R. et A. C. considered the magician’s traditional ability to control the great forces that flow through the universe as fundamental to Adeptship. Equally, it instructed initiates in the procedures for invoking nonhuman spirits and deities, and taught, following ancient Egyptian magic, how the initiate might inflame herself with the power of a deity and thereby take on the characteristics of an invoked force. And students were shown how to open up channels of communication with nontemporal worlds and acquire the knowledge and special powers of the spirits and gods that inhabit them. But all this was seen as part of the process of attaining the great gift of occult wisdom, which presages the kind of enlightenment for which the true Adept strives. In the final analysis, the acquisition of magical powers was all about an aspiration to the perfections of what Anna Kingsford in her teachings had conceived of as the Christ-spirit. As reinterpreted by the Golden Dawn, with its own distinctive Rosicrucian overtones of spiritual attainment, the magician was the prophetic representative of a new and sublime form of humanity.

In the Second Order, occult wisdom and its corollary magical power were seen as presaging the final realization of the Rosicrucian ideal—the Great Man of Hermetic tradition, or what advanced initiates referred to as the Perfect Man. This concept of magic as the Great Work that would lead the Adept into perfection underlay the entire conception of the R. R. et A. C. and was made explicit from the outset. All candidates for admission to the Adeptus Minor grade were required, as part of their initiation, to swear a solemn undertaking “that with the Divine Permission I will, from this day

forward, apply myself to the Great Work—which is, to purify and exalt my Spiritual Nature so that with the Divine Aid I may at length attain to be more than human.”⁶² But what did it mean “to be more than human,” and how was this to be achieved? Great thaumaturgic powers that represented the highest manifestation of human capability were seen to be part of the process, but magic as it was conceived in the Second Order was also centrally involved with bringing the magician into direct communion with God and thus (although possibly only momentarily) to a state of almost superhuman semidivinity. This experience of oneness with God, or the closest most can come to knowing God, was achieved through a series of complex and intense meditation exercises in which the magician visualized herself traveling up the Tree of Life in order to meet and become suffused with Divine Light as it streamed down from the uppermost First Sephiroth known as the Crown (Kether).

The routes up through the Tree of Life were varied, but the path most commonly taken in the Second Order was called the Middle Pillar. The technique of the Middle Pillar involves a direct ascent from the tenth or last Sephiroth, the Kingdom (Malkuth), which constitutes our own material world, up the central path or trunk to a resting place at the heart of the Tree of Life. Here, in the Sephiroth known as Beauty (Tiphareth), the magician undergoes an experience so powerful that it effects a kind of personal transformation, a transmutation that was the ultimate purpose of much Second Order magical work. It was this transmutation that Anna Kingsford had called the Great Work.⁶³ In the Second Order the Great Work was synonymous with magic, but magic designed to promote a very specific end. As Vestigia Nulla Retrorsum (Moina MacGregor Mathers) put it, “It must be our object then, to become that Perfect Man.”⁶⁴

Those senior Adepts who took this admonition at face value accepted that as magicians they were committed to the lifelong pursuit of the Rosicrucian ideal, but as the Second Order began to mature during the 1890s divisions started to emerge around questions of leadership and the related issues of magical pursuits and the future direction of the R. R. et A. C. In 1892 the MacGregor Matherses left London for Paris, where, supported by Annie Horniman’s money, Moina Mathers was expected to resume her painting studies. Much to Annie Horniman’s consternation MacGregor Mathers and his various occult ventures monopolized Moina’s time, but in MacGregor Mathers’s absence Fortiter (Horniman) herself assumed the role of trusted lieutenant in the Golden Dawn. In 1894 Horniman was invited to consecrate MacGregor Mathers’s Athathoor Temple No. 7 in Paris, which listed the occultist Dr. Gérard Encausse (or Papus) among its early

members, while she continued to send money to Paris and MacGregor Mathers maintained his instructions to the “Fratres et Sorores” in Britain.

By 1895 Horniman was spending over £400 a year in order to maintain the MacGregor Matherses in Paris, and was becoming increasingly uneasy about MacGregor Mathers’s financial demands, his militarism, and his obsession with Scotland and the House of Stuart. During the same period Horniman became involved in a dispute involving Resurgam (Dr. Edward Berridge) and other high-ranking members of the R. R. et A. C.⁶⁵ As letters flew back and forth across the channel, MacGregor Mathers attempted to reassert his authority as Chief Adept, while his senior officers chafed beneath his autocratic rule. Horniman finally withdrew her financial support of the MacGregor Matherses in 1896 and the Chief in turn expelled her from the Golden Dawn, whereupon virtually all the members of the Second Order drew up a petition on her behalf that MacGregor Mathers ignored. Annie Horniman remained in the wilderness for the next three years, and in 1897 the Golden Dawn lost the benign influence of William Wynn Westcott, who was forced to retire from his senior office in the R. R. et A. C. when government officials made it clear to him that “foolishly posturing as one possessed of magical powers” was not expected of a Coroner of the Crown.⁶⁶

Although anxiety and dissent pervaded the inner Second Order, both Orders of the Golden Dawn continued to operate fully and attract new members. One of these was Aleister Crowley, then a young man in his early twenties, who entered the First Order in November 1898 as *Perdurabo* [I will last through]. Westcott remained influential behind the scenes, and Florence Farr now became MacGregor Mathers’s chosen representative in London. In accordance with his directions and her own inclinations, Farr now relaxed the stringent Second Order examination system—a move that did not meet with Horniman’s approval when the latter subsequently reentered the picture. New trials, however, lay ahead. MacGregor Mathers was now financially involved with another member of the Second Order, De Profundis Ad Lucem (Frederick Leigh Gardner), a friend of Annie Horniman’s, who ran afoul of Florence Farr in her official capacity as acting Chief Adept owing to his lack of dignity and tact. Once again there was a flurry of correspondence as MacGregor Mathers refused to intervene on Gardner’s behalf and the latter was temporarily exiled to another of the Golden Dawn’s Temples where Farr did not have to listen to his woefully inadequate and unmusical ritual intonation.

All this interpersonal animosity, however, paled into insignificance when, in February 1900, Florence Farr received a devastating letter from MacGre-

gor Mathers, seemingly written in response to her stated desire to resign her position in the Second Order so that she could work more closely with William Wynn Westcott. In this letter MacGregor Mathers denounced Westcott, one of the original three Chiefs of the Golden Dawn, claiming that he had “NEVER been *at any time* either in personal or in written communication with the Secret Chiefs of the Order, he having *either himself forged or procured to be forged* the professed correspondence between him and them.”⁶⁷ While MacGregor Mathers could not afford to similarly disparage either the Secret Chiefs or the Order’s founding cypher document, thereby undercutting his own position as Chief Adept, he had essentially thrown into doubt the entire provenance of occult authority within the Golden Dawn.

Florence Farr, in a move that speaks of presence of mind, kept the contents of the letter to herself and left London temporarily to think through the implications of MacGregor Mathers’s accusations. It was clear that if Westcott had forged documentation as crucial as the founding Fräulein Sprengel letters of authorization, let alone communications from the Secret Chiefs, the Golden Dawn was itself merely a recent invention without demonstrable links to a Rosicrucian past. Similarly, if MacGregor Mathers had known about the fictitious nature of the Order he was himself implicated in the fraud. Upon her return to London, Farr called a private meeting of trusted members of the Second Order, letters were dispatched to MacGregor Mathers asking him to come to London and verify his allegations, Westcott was apprised of the situation by Yeats, and finally towards the end of March the matter was set before the Second Order. A seven-person committee that included Farr, Yeats, Dorothea and Edmund Hunter, and Percy Bullock (all friends with Bedford Park connections) was now officially recognized and charged with investigating the matter. Westcott was helpful and maintained his innocence of any wrongdoing, but the vital evidence—the Fräulein Sprengel letters—had by now disappeared from the Order’s archive. MacGregor Mathers, on the other hand, ignored all requests to come to London and fulminated against the committee, which he took to be contravening his authority. He threatened its members with a magical “Punitive Current,” reserved for those who disobeyed their Chief, and ordered it to disband. The committee ignored MacGregor Mathers and by April had turned its attention to the authenticity of the cypher manuscript supposedly passed to Westcott in 1887 by the Reverend Woodford. At this juncture, however, events took a very different turn.

Aleister Crowley, having risen quickly through the grades of the First Order, had duly sought and been denied entrance to the R. R. et A. C. by a London leadership that clearly thought him unsuited to further occult study.

In January of 1900, however, MacGregor Mathers had overruled all objections and admitted Crowley to the Second Order in a ceremony held in Paris. Crowley, having received a letter from Deo Date (Dorothea Hunter) telling him that London refused to accept his recent Parisian initiation, now emerged as MacGregor Mathers's emissary in the business at hand. On the 17 April 1900 Crowley broke into and took possession of the Second Order's rooms (now located at 36 Blythe Road, Hammersmith) on behalf of MacGregor Mathers and with his written permission. There were several skirmishes over the next few days, with Crowley at one point appearing for MacGregor Mathers wearing full highland dress and sporting a ritual mask. Finally, Edmund Hunter, known for his boxing skill, and W. B. Yeats, whose loathing of Crowley was amply reciprocated, won the day. Their persistence, together with the intervention of a constable and the support of the landlord, ensured that the premises were secured on behalf of the London leadership of the Second Order.

The affair, however, had drastic repercussions. In the aftermath of the Blythe Road fiasco the Second Order broke with MacGregor Mathers and his supporter, Dr. Berridge, and in April instituted an elected Executive committee to govern their affairs. This Executive together with leading Golden Dawn officials now made up the Order's ruling Council. Florence Farr assumed a leadership role on the Executive committee as did Annie Horniman, who at this point returned to the Second Order. Yeats was a member and also quickly assumed the crucial office of Imperator of the First Order's Isis-Urania Temple. Conversely, Dr. Berridge opened a rival Isis-Urania Temple No. 3 with MacGregor Mathers's blessing, and the Horus Temple in Bradford and Amen-Ra Temple in Edinburgh similarly remained loyal to the Chief in France. Crowley was not alone in believing that the autocratic MacGregor Mathers, rather than any elected committee, was the last bona fide link to the Secret Chiefs and the source of occult wisdom.

All might now have been plain sailing, however, if Annie Horniman had not immediately made her presence felt as a senior member of the Second Order. Horniman, always a stickler for detail, discovered that many of the Order's records had been allowed to lapse, examinations were no longer rigorously administered, and some of the ceremonies had been altered during her time of absence. She held Florence Farr, as a Chief Adept in charge who cared little for administrative detail, personally responsible and relations between the two women became generally strained. Worse was to follow. Horniman became aware that a series of informal "Secret Groups" had developed within the Second Order that encouraged what she took to be an undisciplined and heterodox approach to magical practice. The most presti-

gious of these was "The Sphere," an elite group of Adepts led by Florence Farr which took the clairvoyant techniques taught in the Second Order to new heights. In Horniman's absence the activities of these "Secret Groups" had become a private passion for privileged Adepts, so there were now initiated elites within elites in the Second Order. Furthermore, under Farr's influence the Second Order (and especially her own "Sphere" group) had become more attuned to ancient Egyptian magic, moving away from a more explicitly Cabalistic and Rosicrucian emphasis.⁶⁸ In this Farr mirrored the Chief's developing preoccupations. MacGregor Mathers had developed an "Isis Movement" in Paris during the 1890s that bore no relation to the Golden Dawn but drew instead on the mystery religion of ancient Egypt. Moina MacGregor Mathers was central to the performance of his Rite of Isis, which became something of a sensation in the Parisian occult underworld, and about 1899 and 1900 attracted the notice of the fashionable world.⁶⁹ Florence Farr had by then published her *Egyptian Magic* as the eighth volume in Wynn Westcott's *Collectanea Hermetica* series, and was to go on to coauthor two "Egyptian" plays with her friend (and Yeats's earlier lover) Olivia Shakespear.⁷⁰ Indeed, Yeats was convinced that George Bernard Shaw had drawn upon the striking memory of Farr in her "Egyptian period" when he wrote his own play, *Caesar and Cleopatra*.⁷¹

None of this cut any ice with Annie Horniman, who looked upon these suspect deviations as something akin to heresy. W. B. Yeats, caught between his friendship with and admiration for Florence Farr and temperamental inclination for precedent and structure, threw in his lot with Annie Horniman.⁷² Yeats and Horniman made their case against the "Secret Groups" and other irregularities in several contentious Council meetings during February 1902, urging a return to the disciplined days of MacGregor Mathers albeit under democratic Council rule. Accusations and counteraccusations flew back and forth as Yeats argued that the separate groups fractured the harmonious working of the Order, his opponents questioned his magical expertise, and Horniman was accused of obsessive and malicious behavior. On 26 February the pair were outvoted on the Council, and the following day they, together with J. W. Brodie-Innes, a lawyer and Imperator of the Amen-Ra Temple in Edinburgh, resigned their offices. A month later Yeats wrote a short essay for distribution to the Second Order entitled "Is the Order of R. R. et A. C. to Remain a Magical Order?" in which he implicitly addressed his critics while addressing in broad terms the place and purpose of magic.⁷³ In spite of the fact that Farr strongly disagreed with his stated position, they remained friends and went on to collaborate in various artistic ventures. It is likely that in 1903 they also briefly became lovers. Neverthe-

less, for Yeats the events of early 1902 must have been particularly painful, as his principled stand separated him for the time being from close friends of long standing. He remained in the Order but moved quietly into the background while Annie Horniman continued her attacks on suspected group activity and Florence Farr did her best to ignore them.

The times, however, were changing. Towards the end of 1901 the Golden Dawn was rocked by the salacious trial of a couple calling themselves Mr. and Madame Horos, who had managed to pass themselves off as high Adepts and were convicted of raping a young girl in a bogus Golden Dawn ceremony.⁷⁴ The adverse publicity was such that many members left the First Order, and the Golden Dawn felt compelled to change its name.⁷⁵ The Second Order was less affected by the Horos trial, but the endless wrangling continued. By March 1902 the Executive leadership had changed yet again, Florence Farr and other luminaries left the Order about this time. Farr joined the Theosophical Society in June 1902, and by then many of the Second Order's most familiar and advanced Adepts—among them Florence Farr's sister, Henrietta Paget, Edmund and Dorothea Hunter, Dr. John Todhunter, and Madame de Steiger—had also left its ranks. Fears that an evil force had penetrated the Order pervaded the attempts to fashion a new constitution. Horniman was blamed for much of the dissension, and blamed others in turn. She continued to rail against the "Secret Groups" (now defunct) that she thought were responsible for much of the misfortune that had befallen the Golden Dawn, and appears to have claimed (unsuccessfully) the right to become Chief Adept.⁷⁶ Trowned by the leadership, Horniman finally resigned from the Order in February 1903. She had already turned her attention and considerable organizing abilities to Yeats, and was immersed in his daily affairs. In a little over a year Horniman was funding and overseeing the project that was to become Yeats's Abbey Theatre in Dublin.⁷⁷ With Annie Horniman's resignation the Golden Dawn lost one of its most senior remaining members who had known MacGregor Mathers and remembered the great days of his tutelage.

In May 1903 one last attempt at reorganization led to a final schism. Again, this reflected not simply the power plays of the various parties but a genuine parting of the ways over issues of purpose and procedure. Arthur Edward Waite gained control of London's Isis-Urania Temple and retained its name, but under his influence the Golden Dawn teachings and ceremonies were adapted to his own brand of Christian mysticism. In November 1903 his newly constituted Independent and Rectified Order R. R. et A. C., Waite's own Second Order, attracted a number of significant Golden Dawn initiates, among them Madame de Steiger, the writer Arthur Machen,

and the Reverend W. A. Ayton.⁷⁸ The latter was one of the earliest initiates of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and the man in whose home Moina Bergson had stayed prior to her marriage to MacGregor Mathers in 1890. Waite's R. R. et A. C. initiated Evelyn Underhill in 1904, and his subsequent Fellowship of the Rosy Cross attracted Charles Williams, the poet and writer.⁷⁹ The tradition of Second Order magical practice as it had developed during the years of Florence Farr's ascendancy was carried on by Dr. Felkin in a newly formed Amoun Temple, and Felkin changed the name of what remained of the old Golden Dawn to Stella Matutina. MacGregor Mathers appointed Dr. Berridge, Annie Horniman's old adversary, as his representative, and Berridge carried on in the MacGregor Mathers tradition in a new Temple and according to his Chief's directives. J. W. Brodie-Innes maintained the direction of the Amen-Ra Temple in Edinburgh as he moved slowly back under MacGregor Mathers's sway. In the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War, Brodie-Innes and MacGregor Mathers became completely reconciled, and the former assumed control in England and Scotland of a MacGregor Mathers-directed Order called Alpha and Omega. MacGregor Mathers himself was busy initiating Americans in Paris, and by 1914 two or three Temples as well as the Masonic Societas Rosicruciana in America were operating under his influence. In 1916 Dr. Felkin and his wife emigrated to New Zealand, and the magic of the Golden Dawn as it was practiced towards the end of the old century reached the Antipodes. By the time MacGregor Mathers died in 1918 the many-faceted traces of his original labors were to be found around the globe.

The history of the Golden Dawn prior to its splintering in 1903 represents in key respects a microcosm of the occult world that formed its broader context. The Order attracted women and men of diverse temperament and outlook who sought a meaningful spiritual dimension to their lives, but it became much more than simply a sociospiritual meeting place. It took on a life of its own that outstripped the original intentions and purview of its creators, and absorbed the emotional, spiritual, and creative energies of its advanced Adepts. And yet, intense though the personal investments in this Magical Order were, the Golden Dawn did not constitute the kind of elitist escape that such an endeavor might seem to suggest. The late-Victorian occult was not divorced from social and cultural concerns, and the Golden Dawn as a Rosicrucian Order particularly stressed the importance of involvement with the temporal world. While George Bernard Shaw raged about Florence Farr's occult "dreams," Farr herself considered that she and her cohort were doing "world" work of the utmost importance. Indeed, inspired by the Eastern teachings of the future Tamil parliamentarian Sir Pon-

nambalam Ramanathan, Farr was to leave England in 1912 to take up the position of principal at his College for Girls in Ceylon.⁸⁰

Madame Blavatsky had taught that the world would enter a new phase with the coming century, passing from a “Dark Age” of materialism into a cycle of great spiritual development; the illuminati of the Golden Dawn were similarly caught up in visions of a new order predicated on spiritual enlightenment. Despite the fact that the Golden Dawn ultimately foundered on the rocks of irreconcilable spiritual differences and personal ambition, its program was dedicated to the kind of regeneration represented symbolically by the figure of Christian Rosencreutz. Even after the horrors of the Great War, Moina MacGregor Mathers could speak of what she saw as the twentieth-century reconciliation of science and occultism in terms of the prophesied spiritual “evolution of this planet.”⁸¹ Within occultism work towards this “evolution” took both an esoteric and exoteric form. It was simultaneously “inner” and “outer” in design and execution, and in its latter manifestation emerged as a variously conceived (and contested) politics. Not least of this was a sexual politics that spoke to a changing gender climate at the turn of the century.

CHAPTER THREE

Sexual Politics

The “new” occultism of the 1880s and 1890s emerged concurrently with a range of “new” movements and social identities that characterized the final years of the old century. Amid claims to boldness and innovation, the designation “new” came to stand for very differently conceived initiatives on the social, cultural, and political fronts. New forms of political and labor organization rubbed rhetorical shoulders with mass-market journalism and increasingly unstable notions of gender distinction. Exhilarating to some, the “new” was nevertheless suggestive of such a divergent range of possibilities that even the most enthusiastic supporters of change might not necessarily be united across its spectrum. Equally, whether it be the New Unionism or the New Woman, the “new” offered presentiment of deep-seated change and was regarded by many with a distaste bordering on foreboding.

In certain circles it was readily acknowledged that one of the “two great problems of modern social life” was “the problem of women,” and like its putative counterpart “the problem of labor,” the changing position of women had far-reaching ramifications that were to affect the future social and political landscape.¹ A newly formulated “woman question,” however, was only one aspect of a more broadly constituted set of issues that would help to set the tone “of modern social life.” As discussion of the “woman question” was superseded by talk of the New Woman and the nation was treated to the spectacle of Oscar Wilde’s trial, the 1890s ushered in a range of gender and sexual identities that many found deeply disturbing. The “manly woman” and apparently feminized man seemed to critics to be representative of a modern sexual economy marked by the descent into anarchy. The work of Aubrey Beardsley during the 1890s captured the period’s fascination with, and fear of, a sexualized gender ambiguity that an emerging literature which opened up discussion of sexual typologies did nothing to allay.²

The New Woman was a journalistic and literary invention that nevertheless spoke to the social realities of a changing climate for women at the end of the century. Legislative changes giving women greater rights as wives and mothers, the lowering of barriers to higher education, new opportunities for governance at the local level, the opening of the medical profession, and development of a female “white blouse” labor market all worked to somewhat improve women’s status and opportunities. The women largely affected by many of these developments came mainly from the wide spectrum of the middle classes, and the New Woman was similarly the product of relative class privilege. Lampooned in the periodical press, particularly in *Punch*, a cryptic commentator on changing gender and sexual mores, the New Woman was characterized as an overeducated mannish creature affecting “rational dress” and much given to the masculine pursuits of smoking and serious reading. The Girton Girl, a reference to the denizens of the Cambridge women’s college, became a familiar journalistic motif of the period. Young, serious, sporting the college tie, she was parodied and ridiculed in spite (and undoubtedly also because) of her academic credentials. It was not lost on *Punch* that a Girton student easily secured first place in the 1887 classical tripos, trouncing the Cambridge men and helping to establish the intellectual credibility of women scholars.³ But the New Woman was also linked in the journalistic mind with an aberrant sexuality, either an unhealthy renunciation of motherhood or the challenging of conventional sociosexual codes that were intrinsic to the so-called New Woman fiction. Often cast in the same mold as the feminized and sexually suspect men exemplified by Wilde, the New Woman was represented by hostile commentators as the morbidly sexual and morally corrupt counterpart to the male “decadents” of the period.⁴

During the 1890s these attitudes fed straight into fears of racial as well as aesthetic degeneracy, and it was not simply critics of the New Woman who lined up against any suggestion of unconventional femininity. Many feminists were themselves committed not only to a single high standard of sexual purity for women and men, but also to the idea of motherhood as both the apotheosis of womanliness and the racially defined responsibility of respectable middle-class women. So while Grant Allen’s New Woman novel *The Woman Who Did* explores the theme of sexual freedom for women, Sarah Grand’s feminist novel *The Heavenly Twins* reiterates a marital ideal of sexual purity even as it scandalized Victorian audiences with its treatment of the subject of venereal disease.⁵ There were a variety of feminist positions on sexual morality, and movement between these positions; but a commitment to moral purity and a concerted attack on the double sexual standard for

women and men remained a key component of the mainstream women's suffrage campaign. It is hardly surprising, then, that feminists were not uniformly in favor of embracing a New Woman identity, with its sexualized profile, and were similarly resistant to becoming associated with "the decadence." Oscar Wilde had certain feminist credentials—his wife, Constance, was active in the campaign for dress reform, and as editor of *Woman's World* he commissioned work on women's rights—but many women were anxious not to be associated either with him or others of his close circle. In practical terms it would have been strategically unwise for women's rights activists to support Wilde after the revelations of 1895, but feminist critiques of a suspect decadence were indicative of a more deep-seated hostility toward anything that smacked of sociosexual perversity. Indeed, feminism and the idea of the New Woman existed in uneasy relationship to each other partly because it was so difficult to speak about anything approaching a "new" feminine gender and sexual identity in the available language of moral superiority and racial pride.⁶

There is no doubt that the way in which the occult was configured at the turn of the century held huge appeal for both women and men partly because of its potential to speak to an emerging range of positions on sexual politics. Feminists were attracted to groups like the Theosophical Society because the occult offered a "Transcendental View of Social Life" that spoke directly to feminist aspirations for change. Occultism was itself bound up with a spiritualized vision of social change that called upon those ideals of regeneration and self-fulfillment that were deeply attractive to feminists of the period, and offered a "new" religiosity capable of outstripping the conventional Victorian association of femininity with a domesticated spirituality. At the same time, precisely because occultism was a spiritual movement, it appeared not to fly in the face of a more conservative position on women's place in the moral and temporal order of things. The occult therefore had the potential to support both traditional and progressive positions on the "woman question," and had little difficulty in appealing to those in the suffrage movement whose political aspirations were closely allied to an alternative moral and spiritual vision of the world. This is not to say that all women activists were drawn to the occult, but there was certainly a constituency for whom the temporal and spiritual were intrinsically linked. Women as different in their political vision as Annie Besant, Dora Marsden, Charlotte Despard, and Eva Gore-Booth sought to work out critical issues around sexual difference and an equal rights agenda through recourse to a kind of theosophical feminism. Although the development of a fully articulated feminism within occult organizations like the Theosophical Society

was by no means uncontested terrain, occultism in the years prior to the Great War facilitated the articulation of a spiritualized feminism that should not be underestimated.⁷

Crucially, however, a “new” occultism underpinned by an emphasis on practical magic had recourse to a masculine persona that appealed to men and women alike. During a period in which masculinity was assuming a variety of different faces, the occult offered men the possibility of a direct spiritualized experience of the other world that avoided the feminized connotations of spiritualist mediumship. Like so-called muscular Christianity, the “new” occultism also suggested (wrongly, as we shall see) a spiritualized path that might avoid the taint of homosexuality with which male spiritualist mediumship and both Anglo and Roman Catholicism were often associated.⁸ For women, the occult presented an opportunity to develop a masculine persona that in a quite different context was being pilloried by critics of the “manly” woman.

In both cases the appeal of the “new” occultism was located in part in its distinctly robust characterization of the spiritual endeavor. In particular, an occultism that incorporated magical practice was established as an undertaking having to do with the exercise and assertion of the will. Willpower was closely associated with what Victorians referred to as the “masculine temperament,” and the will was considered by many physicians to act as the guarantor of manly health and efficacy. Women were thought to incline towards “feminine passivity,” and where physicians encountered evidence to the contrary they were quick to pathologize and condemn. Within occult circles, however, the will was to be tutored and honed as the essential attribute of the magician regardless of distinction of sex. The power of willed effects is in part what magic is about, and this was how it was presented to those who went through the training grounds of the Golden Dawn’s Second Order and the Theosophical Society’s Esoteric Section. William Wynn Westcott told those who stood poised at the threshold of the Second Order that “an *Indomitable Will*” was an essential condition of entry, while Evelyn Underhill explained that “[i]n the will there resides, for the occultist, a force as powerful and amenable as electricity.”⁹

In contrast to both mediumship and mysticism, which were conceived as having to do with the surrender of self, magic was predicated on the assertion of an aggrandizing self and the unabashed projection of magical authority. Furthermore, mysticism was associated with an emotionalism, a state of rapture, which did not accord with the intellect-driven will to know characterizing the magical endeavor. Evelyn Underhill, trained in Golden

Dawn methods but ultimately favoring the mystical path, explained the critical difference between magic and mysticism in just these terms:

In mysticism the will is united with the emotions in an impassioned desire to transcend the sense-world, in order that the self may be joined by love to the one eternal and ultimate Object of love. . . . In magic, the will unites with the intellect in an impassioned desire for supersensible knowledge. This is the intellectual, aggressive, and scientific temperament trying to extend its field of consciousness, until it includes the supersensible world: obviously the antithesis of mysticism, though often adopting its title and style.¹⁰

Magic and mysticism were in effect subtly gender coded, with magic—"intellectual, aggressive, and scientific"—assuming a masculine status. Underhill came to see magic as "self-seeking transcendentalism," but this was not a condemnation. She was merely acknowledging the different ends to which magic was directed. Although magicians were often concerned with mystical union, they were, as Underhill claimed, systematically trained in "the deliberate exaltation of the will, till it transcends its usual limitations and obtains for the self or group of selves something which it or they did not previously possess." Colonizing in intent and "scientific" in design, magical training set out to cultivate what Underhill called the "I, Me, Mine" of individuality with a view to establishing knowledge of and control over "the supersensible world." In this sense magic was indeed "an individualistic and acquisitive science."¹¹ It was also the perfect foil to a bourgeois individualism that was widely perceived to be under attack. Whatever the political persuasion of magicians, magic established the supreme importance of the individual "I" in a rapidly changing world, shored up the masculinist persona of late-Victorian men who sought spiritual enlightenment, and suggested that women might acquire if not already possess the "masculine temperament." Intellect, self-assertion, knowledge, science, and power; the "new" occultism had it all.

This "all" clearly encompassed a range of possibilities not readily available to women, and part of the appeal of the occult lay in the promise of extended vistas on several levels. These levels included the personal as well as the spiritual and temporal. Key female occultists like Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Anna Kingsford, Florence Farr, and Annie Besant manifested dissatisfaction with a restrictive Victorian lifestyle and a certain personal restiveness that caused each in her own way to break the mold of conventional womanhood. Additionally, these women possessed the inquir-

ing minds and questing personalities that almost by definition characterized the dedicated occultist. Interestingly, this has drawn a pejorative appraisal in recent accounts that sounds positively Victorian. Florence Farr's biographer, for example, in a reductionist assessment of why this gifted woman devoted so much of her time and energy to magic, considers magic to have been "a necessary anodyne for [an] often troubled, searching personality."¹²

Farr herself, however, considered gratified contentment "fatal" to the success of magic or the Great Work. "The man who is content with anything," she writes, "who does not feel in his most successful moments, during the most sacred earthly joys, a keen sense of want and disappointment, can never hope to find the Stone of the Wise"—by which she meant the attainment of "true wisdom and perfect happiness."¹³ A disappointment with and corresponding indifference to the fleeting triumphs and passing pleasures of this world was characteristic of Florence Farr, but all serious occultists were encouraged to view the things of this world as only one aspect of meaningful reality. Equally, Farr used the phrase "the search for reality" in the subtitle of her novel, *The Solemnization of Jacklin*, which deals in allegorical fashion with the kind of personal transformation implied by the Great Work. Thoroughgoing personal change was considered crucial to the development of the magical Adept, while the descriptive term *seeker* was one that applied across the board to senior occultists. Thus the yoking of *troubled* and *searching*, which appears in different form in other accounts of this generation of women occultists, is problematic.¹⁴

The issue is not that the occult necessarily attracted "troubled" women, but that it permitted women the exercise of a "masculine temperament" and provided an intellectual and spiritual outreach that were difficult to find elsewhere. Occultism appealed to an aspiring, questing nature regardless of sex, and additionally presented a viable context in which women could explore that nature while enjoying the felicities of like-minded companionship. In purely practical terms, women found in occult organizations a unique sociospiritual environment offering personal validation and an intellectual rapport that was not easily duplicated. Occultism represented itself as a learned science at a time when higher education was an option only for the few, and women were attracted by the prospect of the kind of dedicated advanced study that practical magic required. As Dorothea Hunter, "Deo Date" of the Golden Dawn, later remarked, "the Order was my university."¹⁵ Furthermore, women were successful in the magical world and rose without hindrance through the hierarchical grades. Even the male founders of the Golden Dawn, with their close ties to Freemasonry, recognized that the time had come to admit women to the inner sanctum of occult studies.

William Wynn Westcott freely acknowledged this, and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers readily espoused an equality of the sexes that went beyond the valorization of female spiritual authority and the occult credentials of the feminine. A great admirer of Anna Kingsford, he deplored the way in which women had been written out of the orthodox Christian tradition and had no problem in delegating authority to women within the Golden Dawn.¹⁶ Occultism thus offered women a unique form of “higher learning” together with the opportunity for seniority and leadership in occult organizations.

This does not mean, of course, that gender antagonism within occult organizations was nonexistent. There were undoubtedly those who deeply resented female authority. The battle over the presidency within the Theosophical Society between the Bertram Keightley and Annie Besant factions probably contained an element of this resentment, but the struggle was complicated by a range of other issues. It was more clearly visible in the Golden Dawn after the withdrawal of MacGregor Mathers to Paris and his nomination of Florence Farr as his London representative. Farr was highly punctilious in the matter of ceremonial, and was particularly sensitive to any debasement of the staging or intonation of ritual. In 1897 Frederick Leigh Gardner, a stockbroker with close ties to the Theosophical Society as well as the Golden Dawn, was sternly rebuked by Farr for his abrupt treatment of Adepts and appalling lack of ceremonial nicety. Gardner indignantly appealed to Mathers, who in spite of being involved in financial negotiations with him, refused to undercut Farr’s authority. In the unpleasantness that followed it was arranged that Gardner should temporarily transfer from the Isis-Urania Temple to the Golden Dawn’s Horus Temple at Bradford. Hardly convenient for a London-based man, there is no indication that this arrangement bore fruit. Nevertheless, Gardner used the opportunity to complain to T. H. Pattinson, head of the Bradford Temple and a Yorkshire watchmaker, about his treatment at the hands of Farr. Pattinson responded by assuring Gardner that “all the Horus fellows agree that they could not conform (?T) [sic] in any way to such treatment. . . . No petticoat government will do for us in any way.”¹⁷

But “petticoat government” was what men in occult organizations got. From the outset, women were crucial to the development and leadership of the “new” occultism. Women had been central to Victorian spiritualism as particularly effective spirit mediums, and although the “new” occult generated a radically different gender credo, it was impacted by the already established importance of women’s presence and participation in spiritualist movements. Indeed, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky herself came

from just such a background. Blavatsky, a powerful and charismatic figure, was key to the definition of a late-Victorian occultism that assumed the importance of women even if in practice the issue of women's leadership was somewhat fraught. It is not, however, simply that women were visible and active in these organizations. The women who were to make their names within the "new" occultism each publicly espoused views on women that could be characterized in varying degrees as progressive. This marked them off from the majority of British spiritualist mediums who had come to public attention only a couple of decades earlier.¹⁸ Certainly Kingsford, Farr, and Besant each embraced unconventional domestic arrangements after turning their backs on unsatisfactory marriages to pursue complete independence and fulfillment. Equally, although their attitudes towards women and the "woman question" might differ as well as shift over the years, these women sought in their different ways to integrate their mission to establish their own autonomy and equality into the spiritual message that each espoused and propagated.

Anna Bonus Kingsford was born in 1846 to a prosperous mercantile family, and from her childhood years showed the early visionary proclivities and "faculty of seership" claimed by many spiritualist mediums in their autobiographical accounts.¹⁹ Sent to a fashionable school for young ladies in Brighton, Annie Bonus also exhibited from an early age the strength of will and independent thinking that characterized her as an adult. The ill health—also a familiar motif in narratives of mediumistic childhood—that dogged her did nothing to dampen her ambition, and in her late teens she began to try her hand as a writer of short stories. At the age of nineteen Annie Bonus inherited an income of seven hundred pounds a year from her father, more than enough to establish herself in genteel comfort, but she longed for an active and purposeful life. In 1867 she was introduced to spiritualism by Miss F. J. Theobald, an eminently respectable spiritualist, who recorded in her diary a meeting with a bright young woman who "called on me to request my signature to a petition for the protection of married women's property."²⁰ Already caught up in the agitation for the equal rights of women, Annie Bonus was nevertheless not unusual among women of her social class in looking to marriage as a means of securing freedom from familial restraint. She made it a condition of the marriage to her cousin Algernon Godfrey Kingsford that she should not be restricted in any future choice of career, a condition to which he apparently willingly agreed, but the marriage was short-circuited almost before it began. The young bride was seized with an asthma attack so severe on the day after the commencement of her wedding trip that she was removed to her mother's house, and

according to Maitland's account, remained there until after the birth of a daughter named Eadith. As this must also have been Anna Kingsford's version of events, it appears that she was anxious to let it be known that the conception of her child within days of the wedding also marked the end of her marriage. After that it was a marriage "in little more than name."²¹

Anna Kingsford's husband entered the ministry as an Anglican clergyman, but Kingsford herself was increasingly attracted to Roman Catholicism. She was confirmed in the Catholic faith by Archbishop Manning in 1872, and was then already receiving the nightly visions that became the basis of her mysticism and "Esoteric Christianity." At the same time, Kingsford was carving out her own niche in the world of progressive causes. She purchased *The Lady's Own Paper*, a London weekly magazine, edited it herself, and used its pages to promote social reform. Her espousal of women's suffrage brought her the recognition and respect of some of the most well-known activists of the day, including Frances Power Cobbe, Sophia Jex Blake, Elizabeth Wolstenholme, and Barbara Bodichon, and as the women's movement grew she (like many others) adhered to a constitutionalist position.

Although she supported women's suffrage all her life, Kingsford came to deplore what she saw as the hostility towards men and overt championing of spinsterhood among many of its female advocates. She increasingly assumed a spiritualist championing of equality in which she argued for the balance of feminine and masculine principles in men and women alike. Similarly, Kingsford favored the full development of a woman's femininity as part of the necessary spiritual development of any female incarnation on this earth. While always favoring "Equal rights and equal experiences," she opposed what she saw as an increasingly masculinist tendency among women activists and after two years gave up the proprietorship of her magazine.²² Anna Kingsford went on to become one of the pioneer women physicians who trained in Paris because her own country refused her accreditation, and in her thirties was known as a renowned orator in the causes of antivivisection, vegetarianism, and dress reform.²³ She achieved all of this in spite of indifferent health and in addition to her role as the "divine Anna" of the "new" occultism.

Annie Besant, only a year older than Anna Kingsford, similarly rejected both Anglicanism and marriage in the form of separation from her husband. Annie Wood, raised by an impecunious but resourceful mother, and benefiting from the attentions of a wealthy and beneficent spinster, Miss Ellen Marryat, was a spirited and accomplished young woman when she met Frank Besant.²⁴ Ardently religious, she had flirted with Roman Catholi-

cism before accepting the arguments of the Oxford Movement on the legitimate (but non-Roman) Catholicism of the Church of England. She longed to serve Christ, and this seems to account for her early attraction to Frank Besant—then a mere deacon, but soon to be ordained in the Anglican Church. Her marriage at the age of twenty-one, however, was a disaster from the outset. Reading between the lines of her account, the wedding night came as a terrible shock. Completely ignorant “of all that marriage meant,” Annie Besant remembered that she had been “scared and outraged at heart from the very first.”²⁵ The sense of outrage remained with her, and while the sexual trauma might have lessened over time, Frank Besant’s harsh and possibly violent attempts to control his young wife did nothing to heal the breach between them. He was set on forcing her to conform to the role of dutiful and submissive wife, while she in turn set her heart and will against him. The birth of two children—a son, Digby, and daughter, Mabel—in quick succession did little to help matters. Although a doting mother, the agonies of her personal life led to ill health and depression. In these harrowing circumstances, Annie Besant began to lose her Christian faith. Like so many of her contemporaries she became uneasy about the Christian doctrines of eternal punishment and vicarious atonement, and began first to question and then to renounce belief in the deity of Christ. For a young woman as fervently religious as Besant had so recently been, this was a period of dark despair. It seemed as though her entire world had crumbled.

The Reverend Frank Besant, however, already on poor terms with his wife, was outraged by her religious scruples and doubts. When she refused to remain in his church during the celebration of Holy Communion, matters were brought acrimoniously to a head. In July 1873, after five-and-a-half years of marriage, Annie Besant left her husband, and their parting was recognized by a formal deed of separation that autumn.²⁶ At the age of twenty-six Besant found herself without financial support beyond the allowance initially paid by her husband to support their three-year-old daughter (at Frank Besant’s insistence, only Mabel was permitted to live with her mother).²⁷ Annie Besant immediately set about making a new life for them both. She threw herself into the secularist cause, undertook paid journalism, and began to acquire a public persona as a formidable campaigner for Freethought and birth control. In the wake of the infamous Knowlton trial in the late 1870s, when Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh faced imprisonment for publishing birth-control literature, Besant assumed an active role in a revived Malthusian League and wrote her own pamphlet on the issue of family limitation.²⁸ Her *Law of Population*, published in installments in the *National Reformer* and reprinted as a 6-penny pamphlet, was a runaway

success.²⁹ The pamphlet had a section devoted to an examination of birth control methods, and according to the 1882 edition it sold forty thousand copies in the first three years of publication. Frank Besant used his wife's notoriety, particularly her anti-Christian views, as grounds for removing Mabel from her mother's care. When the case was heard, the judge, Sir George Jessel, Master of the Rolls, ruled that Mabel Besant must be returned to her father. Of Annie Besant the judge, recalling the Knowlton trial, stated, "One cannot expect modest women to associate with her."³⁰

Besant, however, resolutely refused to accept that the support of birth control implied a lack of respectability, and made it clear in her *Law of Population* that she was not against the institution of marriage. Unlike the Reverend Malthus, who had advocated celibacy and late marriage as the preferred "preventive check" against unmanageable population growth, the Malthusian League favored early marriage along with the acceptance of parental responsibility and family limitation. Besant similarly argued for the benefits of early marriage on both physical and moral grounds, suggesting that early loving marriage was one sure road to felicitation as well as a bulwark against the spread of prostitution. She roundly denounced the "moral restraint" favored by Malthus as unnatural, and maintained that the satisfaction of bodily needs is both necessary and legitimate for both sexes.

Besant's position was clear. Birth control was necessary in order to alleviate the desperate conditions of the working classes and protect the health of women everywhere, but marriage and controlled parenthood represent the healthy and harmonious course for men and women alike. Elsewhere, most notably in her 1878 pamphlet on the subject, Besant was less sanguine about marriage. But here she was addressing the pressing need for reform of the marriage laws, arguing "that no wise and self-respecting woman should, with her eyes open, enter into a contract of marriage while the laws remain as they are." Although Besant suggested that "women have a fairer chance of happiness and comfort in an unlegalised than in a legal marriage," because in the former they retain their "natural rights," she equally acknowledged that ideally "it is to be desired that marriage should be legally binding." In 1878 Besant was speaking to the issue of marriage "as it is" rather than opposing conjugal union per se.³¹

It is quite possible that in the years following the separation from her husband Besant sought elsewhere the sexual fulfillment that had been lacking in her marriage. Her unconventional domestic arrangements and close relationships with Charles Bradlaugh, Edward Aveling, and George Bernard Shaw during the 1870s and 1880s raised eyebrows even among her own circle, but opinions varied as to whether or not these were sexual relationships.

Although Annie Besant fell in love more than once, it is not clear that she ever took a lover in the conventional sense.³² What does seem certain is that with the passing of time she had come to believe in the possibility of compatible sexual love when accompanied by mutual respect and an appreciation on both sides of the benefits of regulating pregnancy. Besant maintained her advocacy of birth control until the late 1880s when she encountered Theosophy, and this, together with her antice libacy stance, placed her firmly on the side of the divorce of sexual relations from procreation in marriage. Her position put her at odds with those in the women's movement who saw birth control as a license for unbridled male sexuality, as well as those who favored spinsterhood as the only reliable path to women's happiness and autonomy. Marriage, however, was the only respectable route to motherhood, and Besant, who had been devastated by the loss of both her children, seemingly believed that under the right circumstances marriage could be the source of a happiness that had been denied her.

Florence Farr's case was very different. Her marriage to the young actor Edward Emery at the age of twenty-four deteriorated over the course of four years, but their separation was apparently not bitter or fraught in the way that Annie Besant's had been. At least, Farr seemed to make little of it—perhaps more a question of temperament than circumstance. Farr hated domestic routine and had a low opinion of the married state, and when her husband left for America in 1888 she assumed her freedom with contentment and relief. She made no secret of her “advanced” views on women and marriage, and apparently took lovers in a relaxed, almost offhanded way, which suggests that legal or even binding emotional ties were not much to her liking. She and the ever-philandering George Bernard Shaw became lovers during the early 1890s, several years after he had adroitly sidestepped a committed relationship with Annie Besant, and Shaw was to remark that Florence Farr “set no bounds to her relations with men whom she liked.”³³ W. B. Yeats, however, who possibly had a brief affair with Farr early in their enduring friendship, observed that she seemed to distance herself emotionally from the “actual things” of this world. He was particularly struck by the fact that she was not only “contemptuous” of the power exerted by her considerable beauty but also amusedly detached by declarations of love. Later he recalled that she used to say, “When a man begins to make love to me I instantly see it as a stage performance.”³⁴ This sense of detachment might account for Farr's reputation as somehow asexual in spite of her seeming availability, beauty, and bewitching presence.

There is in fact every indication that Farr was only too well aware of the power of the “sacred earthly joys,” but resisted becoming serious about the

men in her life because she abhorred the restrictions and inequalities of marriage and knew at first hand all about the disillusionments of love. She was also fastidious and perhaps felt (in the words of one of her fictional characters) that "To an intellectual person the whole business of love-making is ridiculous, and without dignity."³⁵ She later wrote a novel that sought to examine the difficult terrain of relationships between women and men. In this novel she again writes of "the ungraceful antics of love," but centrally explores what it means for a woman who finds herself "possessed of a passion that attained to the experience of religious ecstasy."³⁶ It is possible that Farr saw through a good deal of male romantic posturing while recognizing in herself a passionate woman for whom the sexual and religious could be equated. If so, she might have been aware that she could all too easily lose herself in a man. Florence Farr would have viewed such a loss as disastrous, particularly for the woman. It is noteworthy that she has the philandering George Travers in her lighthearted novel, *The Dancing Faun*, which parodied male behavior and owed something to her current relationship with George Bernard Shaw, say to his young actress wife, "Our love was of that resistless kind . . . but it does not last. Our delirium is over. You are a woman full of dreams and imaginations; you worry me with the persistent foolishness of your ideas and ideals. I am a man . . . I know how to play the game; you do not."³⁷ We will never know whether or not Shaw said something along these lines. In fact, in spite of his endless flirtations, it seems unlikely. It was Florence Farr who tended to tire quickly of romantic involvements, and Shaw maintained that they parted painlessly.

Unlike Annie Besant, then, Florence Farr was not concerned to defend either the institution of marriage or a conventional understanding of womanly chastity. Admittedly, as an actress, she was in a different business from Besant the public figure and campaigner, but Farr did assume the role of social commentator in 1907, when she began to write for the *New Age*. George Bernard Shaw, who had a financial interest in the journal run by Holbrook Jackson and A. R. Orage, recommended Farr as a contributor, and she joined the ranks of some of the most interesting thinkers and writers of the day. In a series of articles later to be collected and published as a book entitled *Modern Woman: Her Intentions*, Farr outlined her position on a host of issues relating to women.³⁸ She was dismissive of those unliberated individuals whom Shaw referred to as "unwomanly" women, denouncing the conventional wiles with which women attracted and "secured" men and arguing that female chastity amounted to little more than an investment in the future for women with marriage in mind. Equally she maintained that chastity could hardly be counted as a virtue in those supposedly refined

women who thoroughly disliked the sexual side of marriage. Of the conventional female virtues she simply remarked that they promised little in the way of women's future fulfillment. Her views on prostitution and her defense of the interrelationship of the sexual and spiritual in Hinduism were controversial, and make it clear that this was a woman who did not see sexual expression as either inherently distasteful or necessarily sinful. Indeed, she suggested that the East understood in a way that the West did not that sexuality and spirituality could be synonymous. What Farr found repugnant was the idea of a woman being forced by convention or circumstance to remain in a loveless marriage, with all the misery that that implied.

By the time Farr's book appeared in 1910, her views on "modern woman" were hardly new, but they did represent the code by which she herself had lived since the late 1880s. She was in many respects characteristic of the New Woman, intent upon personal and sexual autonomy and determined to live on equal terms with men. Although she was never an activist in the women's movement, Farr's views epitomized those of a generation of younger women at the turn of the century who claimed the right to complete freedom of person. Like Annie Besant during the 1870s and 1880s, Farr's attitude towards sexuality put her at odds with the significant strand of feminist thought that opposed sexual relationships between women and men as necessarily damaging and demeaning to women. Unlike Besant, however, Farr did not retract or rework her ideas as she grew older, or abandon her position on sexuality and celibacy when she became involved with the Theosophical Society at the turn of the century. After encountering the charismatic Blavatsky in 1889, Annie Besant had reversed her stand on both birth control and the inadvisability of celibacy; she further shocked her Malthusian friends when she destroyed all existing copies of her successful *Law of Population* together with the original plates.³⁹ Given Annie Besant's high profile at the end of the 1880s as the foremost female orator of the day, her reversal did not go unremarked. She was castigated by many of those who had been her most loyal supporters, but her newly stated position did accord with one strand of occult thought that found expression among key exponents of the "new" occultism.⁴⁰

Blavatsky was not unusual among occult leaders in advocating celibacy. The advocacy of sexual abstinence is a strain of traditional occult thought that stretched back through sectarian Protestantism, the Rosicrucian tradition, even Renaissance alchemy with its central symbolism of sexual union, and it was present in the teachings of the Theosophical Society, the Esoteric Christian Hermeticism of Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland, and the advanced occultism of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.⁴¹ In gen-

eral occult leaders tended to view celibacy as the distinguishing mark of the perfected life. Blavatsky maintained that sexual indulgence had caused untold misery throughout the generations, while birth control interfered with the laws of reincarnation; she favored self-restraint as the route to spiritual regeneration. Annie Besant in Theosophist mode characterized the “Mysticism of the East” as “Cold, calm, severe”; “it regards sex as a mere temporary expression on the physical plane.” She championed the “whole tendency” in Blavatsky’s work and Theosophical teachings “towards the destruction of the sex-instinct instead of towards its deification.”⁴² Although Anna Kingsford had been the subject of gossip because of her close relationship with Edward Maitland, she similarly understood that “self-denial and restraint” are necessary attributes of the true Adept. She herself had been taught by her spiritual guides to “Deny the body. . . . For to be a Virgin is the crown of discipline.”⁴³ Equally, William Wynn Westcott stressed in a key Golden Dawn document that “a *Clean Life*” was an essential requirement for entry to the Second Order. Perhaps for this reason Moina MacGregor Mathers maintained that she and her husband, a great admirer of Anna Kingsford and the Chief of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, had always chosen “to have nothing whatever to do with any sexual connection—we have both kept perfectly clean.”⁴⁴

But the Western as well as Eastern occult traditions also had their advocates of human sexual expression, and it would have been equally legitimate to point to the validation of sexuality in Hinduism and the (particularly non-Christian) Cabala, the support of conjugal love in Swedenborgianism, or the expectation of permanent spirit unions among many spiritualists. Indeed, some radical communitarian spiritualists in America had appropriated Swedenborgian principles in order to argue for unorthodox sexual relationships outside of marriage. Emanuel Swedenborg had established a theory of correspondences that, among other things, proposed that every woman and man has a soul mate or spiritual affinity. This philosophy was highly attractive to those communitarians and radical spiritualists who saw it as providing the rationale for the abandonment of unsatisfactory marriage partners in favor of such “spiritual affinities,” and often used its tenets to argue against the institution of marriage itself. The association of both Swedenborgianism and spiritualism with “free love” was strongly resisted on both sides of the Atlantic by conventional Swedenborgians and spiritualists alike, and by the 1880s attitudes among outraged spiritualists in Britain had hardened against anything that smacked of “free-passionism,” “free love,” or associated “impure fancies.”⁴⁵ Nevertheless, certain members of occult circles were interested in unorthodox interpretations of Swedenborg and

the sexual heterodoxy of individuals. Among them was the American seer and mystic Thomas Lake Harris, founder of the communitarian Brotherhood of the New Life.

Harris was born in England in 1823 but left for America with his parents as a young child. During the late 1840s he became caught up in the spiritualist ferment that had seized the state of New York, and by the 1850s was claiming for himself celestial powers that surpassed even those of Emanuel Swedenborg. His spiritual philosophy was Swedenborgian, but Harris adapted the Swedish seer's ideas about spiritual counterparts to present a heavily veiled theory of the relationship between appropriate counterparts in earthly life and the efflorescence of divine power. His personal power within his community was such that he could separate married couples at will, and insist upon celibacy even within the married state. In fact, Harris taught that sexual intercourse was original sin and the cause of the Fall, and seems to have advocated a practice later known as "Carezza," that is, sexual intercourse without either movement or orgasm.⁴⁶ Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland had been made aware of Harris's unconventional ideas during a meeting with his British disciple, Laurence Oliphant, but greeted his "highly fantastic conception of the Fall" with "utter repulsion." They were not impressed by the notion that the Fall had come about "through the normal use of sex. Redemption, therefore, must come through its abnormal use—that is, as we read it, through its abuse."⁴⁷ Anna Kingsford was subsequently to go to print in the spiritualist paper, *Light*, admonishing caution when reading the work of both Swedenborg and Harris, according to Maitland, "if only on account of the incompatibility of their modes of living with reliable seership."⁴⁸ W. T. Stead's old mouthpiece *The Pall Mall Gazette* came out against Oliphant and Harris in the early 1890s, and in a lead editorial tried to link Annie Besant to the two "impostors." But if Besant herself was not attracted to Harris's ideas, it is likely that there were those in Theosophical circles who were.⁴⁹

The whole question of human sexuality within the "new" occultism as it emerged out of the 1880s was therefore far from settled. But advanced occultism as it was expounded within a Magical Order like the Golden Dawn stressed that "Hermetic or Brotherly Love" between Adepts must be built on mutual understanding and toleration.⁵⁰ It was perhaps for this reason that Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers and his wife, although apparently celibate themselves, refused to sit in judgment on the sexual proclivities of others. Moina MacGregor Mathers, who recalled the shock of sexual knowledge in her own youth, and stated that she thought any kind of "sexual connection" "bestly," nevertheless urged that "a natural thing should

not upset one so.”⁵¹ Her husband favored forbearance on such matters within the Order, and seemingly had no problem with either Aleister Crowley’s peccadilloes or Florence Farr’s chosen lifestyle. In fact, Farr, with her nonchalant attitude towards sexual relationships, might have most closely aspired to the ideal recommended by one of Kingsford’s spiritual guides, who maintained that it should be “all one to you whether you have a wife or husband, or whether you are celibate . . . it is necessary to set no value on the flesh.”⁵² There were, however, clearly tensions in the Order around this subject. Although there is no sign in the Golden Dawn’s documents of direct teaching on issues of sexuality, it does appear that the topic was broached in the more senior grades of the Order. Scholars approaching the Golden Dawn from an occult perspective disagree as to whether or not the Order taught a version of sex magic, but it seems clear from references in the correspondence between Annie Horniman and the MacGregor Matherses in the mid-1890s that questions of human sexuality, its use within magical practice, and the related issue of disembodied “sex-forces” were indeed considered in this premier Magical Order.⁵³

This was the source of some trouble, which began in 1895 when Annie Horniman apparently became disturbed by discussion within the Order of what was referred to as “the Elemental Theory,” presumably a reference to Elementals, or disembodied spirits, and (in this case) their relationship to human sexuality. It appears that a female member of the Second Order had been recommended “Elemental marriage,” possibly by MacGregor Mathers himself, “because of in her case the *extreme* danger of invoking an incubus instead of a Fay, through want of self control.”⁵⁴ Given Horniman’s somewhat unbending personality and strict probity, as reflected in the very name *Fortiter et Recte* [Bravely and justly] that she had chosen for herself, such topics were almost bound to be both distasteful and alarming. Horniman turned to the MacGregor Matherses, who were then living in Paris and still being financially supported by her, for advice. Her letters to Paris must have contained some criticism of the MacGregor Matherses’ views on the subject, although precisely what these views were we do not know, because her appeal prompted a lengthy reply from her old friend Vestigia (Moina MacGregor Mathers) in which she rebuked Horniman for implying that S. L. MacGregor Mathers’s teachings were in any way “impure.” This, she said, had hurt her deeply. In her letter Vestigia made her own position on sexuality clear, commiserating with Horniman and reassuring her that when she had “first heard of this [Elemental] theory it gave me a shock, but not such a horrible one as that which I had when I was young, about the human connection.” But Vestigia also gently chided Fortiter (Horniman):

You say, or something to that effect, that you are asked to give up your self-respect. You know that you are not asked to change your mode of life in any way, or to teach another to do so. Knowing as yet only something of the composition of the human being (as a Theor[icus] Adept), you are really not in a position to give an opinion on these subjects; so that if one of these uncomfortable cases that have been discussed as to elemental or human sexual connection (which I think with all other sexual connections are *beastly*) came up you would have to refer the question to a member of a much higher grade than Theor. Adept [sic]. . . . To return to the Elementals, the story of Melusina, Undine, and others you will know all refer to marriages between human and elemental and you think them probably very charming stories, because they have a halo of poetry round them. As to exaggeration in you, you distinctly have a fad as regards sexual subjects, and you know it is a dangerous one to have.⁵⁵

It does seem at this point, then, that Horniman was upset about teachings that referred to sexual relationships between Elementals and human beings. Vestigia in turn is suggesting that Annie Horniman, as an Adeptus Minor (the 5° = 6° Grade in the Second Order), must consult a higher authority on these matters before pronouncing judgment. In practice this would have been either S. L. MacGregor Mathers or William Wynn Westcott, and this must have presented Horniman with the difficult prospect of discussing sexual questions with a man. MacGregor Mathers subsequently entered into the correspondence with Horniman, reinforcing the admonition that Horniman must refer all “matters of *sex*” to Westcott and insisting (presumably in answer to Horniman’s complaints about the sexual activities of Adepts) that “what your *companions* do is a matter for *their* consideration and consciences.”⁵⁶ As it was, Vestigia was obliquely reminding her friend that the safe performance of effective magic requires that personal fads (particularly regarding “sexual subjects”) must be set aside. The Golden Dawn taught that any such vestige of personality that enters the magical process will redound with disastrous results on the operator. In Horniman’s case, as MacGregor Mathers was at pains to point out, this could mean “a horrible influx of the *exact opposite of the pure*, into your sphere; disgusting and obscene thoughts etc.”⁵⁷

But although Vestigia cautioned that Horniman’s last two letters were not the product of “a sane cool mind,” the correspondence rumbled on. And there were issues at stake that went beyond Horniman’s particular aversions. A further cause of concern for other members of the Second Order as well as Horniman was Dr. Edward Berridge’s espousal of ideas related to the

sexually unorthodox teachings of Thomas Lake Harris. Dr. Berridge, a senior member of the Second Order, qualified in conventional medicine in 1867 but appears to have obtained his homeopathic credentials in America, where he might first have encountered the mysticism of Harris.⁵⁸ At any event, key members of the Second Order were convinced that Dr. Edward Berridge (Resurgam) and a Dr. C. M. Berridge, who wrote about Thomas Lake Harris under the pseudonym “Respiro,” were one and the same.⁵⁹ A letter written to MacGregor Mathers by William Wynn Westcott, as Chief Adept in Charge, together with a senior female member of the Second Order, complained that Resurgam had “issued a pamphlet and urged doctrines which we all thought impure and mischievous for the young students to whom he offered them.” Once again, this letter referred to the troubling Elemental Theory, the writers stressing that they did not

deny that there may be an important dogma on the subject of the relation between men and Elementals, even for purposes of procreation for those who are much higher in Occultism than we. But that is quite a different thing to our tacitly acquiescing in Res. [sic] spreading among the ignorant a perverted indecent aspect of one of the Higher Truths.⁶⁰

Further, this same letter noted that Resurgam had tried to kiss the female signatory (probably Mrs. Rand, known as Vigilante) in an undignified episode following one of his instruction sessions in astrology: “I was obliged literally to turn him out of the house, so that I have personal experience of his possible behaviour to younger members.”⁶¹ If Berridge had been making unwelcome advances to younger female Adepts, he nevertheless managed to retain the trust of MacGregor Mathers. Edward Berridge remained loyal to the Chief in the subsequent disputes that rocked the Golden Dawn, and was ultimately appointed to continue MacGregor Mathers’s work at home.

Other sexual scandals, however, were not so easily contained. In 1901 the Golden Dawn was thrust into the limelight by the rape trial of Theo Horos, the husband of a woman who had managed to convince MacGregor Mathers some eighteen months earlier that she was the shadowy Anna Sprengel named in the Order’s originary materials. This woman, the self-styled Madame Horos, had impressed Mathers with her ability to relate details of a private conversation he had had with the late Madame Blavatsky, and she had managed to steal occult manuscripts from him before he recognized his error in believing her to be the fabled Soror Sapiens Dominabitur Astris. In fact Madame Horos had already served a prison term for theft in America, but she had also founded a spiritual movement known as the Koreshan

Unity and was able to impress the unwary with her knowledge of occultism and occultists. She managed to take in W. T. Stead and others, and by the end of 1900 was trying to gain admittance to the Golden Dawn. Alerted from Paris by Mathers, the Order's leadership were able to deflect Madame Horos, but she and her husband set up a specious Magical Order of their own, presumably using the documentation stolen from Mathers. This Order seems to have been either a front or an excuse for sexual irregularities and monetary gain. In September 1901, however, Mr. Horos (one Frank Jackson, many years his wife's junior) was arrested on the charge of raping a sixteen-year-old girl named Daisy Adams who had been involved with their Order. Daisy Adams had been persuaded of Theo Horos's divinity and apparently succumbed to his suggestions that she share his bed. When she later began to doubt his authenticity and resisted his blandishments, she was raped in an incident that was attested to by a second woman who had recently arrived at the Horos establishment.

The Golden Dawn's Neophyte ritual, the ritual apparently used by the Horos couple, was described during the trial that followed, and excerpts from the Neophyte oath were read aloud by the Solicitor-General appearing for the prosecution. He declared that this ritual, with its dramatic oath and references to punitive retribution, was blasphemous. To the horror and mortification of Golden Dawn Adepts, the closely guarded secrets of their Order were subjected to public scrutiny, and they themselves were made to look (at best) totally lacking in sense and good judgment. The Golden Dawn was linked to a sexual scandal, the end result of which was a much publicized fifteen years' penal servitude for Mr. Horos and seven years' detention for his wife. The Golden Dawn itself, however erroneously, was now associated in the public imagination with unsavory sexual machinations and the violation of vulnerable young women. MacGregor Mathers rushed to print an explanation of his relationship with the Horos couple, but as the case was *sub judice* from October to December 1901 his letter to *Light* did not appear until January 1902.

The trial must have been the last straw for many of those Adepts who were already embroiled in the dissension within the Golden Dawn, while those with less investment simply quietly removed themselves from the ranks. The membership list compiled in June 1902 shows that twenty Second Order Adepts had died or resigned within the past eighteen months, and a private letter from Westcott noted that one senior member (William Peck of Edinburgh) "was in a ghastly funk over the Horos affair, and hurriedly burnt all his lectures, letters, jewels, robes, etc."⁶² The Horos scandal did not cause the divisions that ultimately divided the Golden Dawn, but in the wake of

the trial many members left the First Order, the Second Order lost some of its most important Adepts, and the Golden Dawn itself recognized the necessity for a change of name. In June 1902 it became the Hermetic Society of the M. R. [Morgenröthe]. It was the end of an era.

But devastating though the Horos scandal might have been, it at least did not directly involve any legitimate members of the actual Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. This was palpably not the case with the scandal that erupted in the Theosophical Society in 1906, one that continued to reverberate down the years. This episode centered on the figure of Charles Webster Leadbeater, a long-time member of the Theosophical Society and trusted lieutenant of Annie Besant. Leadbeater had made himself an authority on the kind of "astral" clairvoyant activities that had been the focus of the "Secret Groups" in the Golden Dawn, and Besant greatly admired his occult and visionary powers. He had become highly successful on the international Theosophical lecture circuit on account of both his psychic abilities and particular interest in the education and training of children, and various Theosophists had entrusted their sons to his care. In early 1906, however, Mrs. Helen Dennis, the mother of one such boy and corresponding secretary of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society in the United States, sent Besant a letter outlining serious charges against Leadbeater. This letter apparently accused Leadbeater of "teaching young boys given into his care habits of self-abuse and demoralizing personal practices." Furthermore, "he does this with deliberate intent and under the guise of occult training or with the promise of the increase of physical manhood."⁶³ A copy of the letter was sent to Leadbeater, who was in Benares with Annie Besant at the time. In the flurry of correspondence that followed it became clear that Leadbeater had taught prepubescent boys how to masturbate, and had advised adolescents to do so on the grounds that it helped to relieve disturbing sexual tension; furthermore, he had enjoined his young charges to secrecy on the matter. It was also clear from these exchanges that Leadbeater was in the habit of inviting these boys into his bed, and there was some suggestion of "reciprocal practice."⁶⁴

Such allegations were deeply troubling, but although Annie Besant did consider Leadbeater's advice to young boys unwise in the extreme, she could not bring herself to believe that anything immoral had occurred. When unsettling letters to boys allegedly written by Leadbeater were circulated in Theosophical circles, she still refused to disown him. Besant's friends urged her to consider the effect on her life and work if these unsavory events were to come to light, especially in the wake of her own notoriety over the birth-control question, while the enraged American leadership pressed for Lead-

beater's expulsion from the Theosophical Society. Mrs. Dennis, in a furious exchange with Besant, employed the rhetoric of high Theosophical ideals and sexual purity, but the old sex-campaigner in Besant bridled at the thought that an occultist of the calibre of Leadbeater should be pilloried over (albeit injudicious) advice on masturbation. Nevertheless, a committee presided over by Colonel Olcott and including senior Theosophists like A. P. Sinnett and G. R. S. Mead was formed in London to consider the entire Leadbeater issue. It held its hearing in May 1906, and was attended by Leadbeater, who gave evidence under assurances of confidentiality. Although the specter of sodomy hung in the air, it was not clear of precisely what Leadbeater was being accused, and in his response to questions he expressed neither misgivings nor apology for his behavior. In the end, however, the committee decided to accept Leadbeater's resignation from the Theosophical Society and let it go at that. This seemed to bring the matter to a close. But as president of the society Besant subsequently sought Leadbeater's reinstatement, and in a highly controversial decision he was readmitted to the Theosophical Society in 1908. This action prompted mass resignations, including those of G. R. S. Mead and Besant's old friend and ally Herbert Burrows, and reinforced the impression among Besant's Theosophical detractors that the society was going to the dogs.⁶⁵

The Leadbeater case forced a discussion of "self-abuse" into the open within the Theosophical Society at a time when masturbation was widely regarded as sinful, morbidly dangerous, or both.⁶⁶ Either way it was hardly a subject for polite conversation. The arguments for and against Leadbeater's advice to boys were complicated, however, by the fact that both Leadbeater and his supporters invoked the issue of occult authority to support his actions. Leadbeater had claimed that his psychic powers enabled him to see the troubled "thought forms" that arose from the sexual torments of puberty, and he stressed the karmic consequences of the kind of immorality (namely, the resort to prostitution or homosexuality) to which such torments could lead. In fact he argued that occasional masturbation helped to maintain sexual continence, thus implicitly removing it from the taint of a sexual act, and hinted that "one at least of the great Church organizations for young men deals with the matter in the same manner."⁶⁷ This appeal to superior occult wisdom and religious precedent enraged some Theosophists but convinced others. It raised once again the broader question of the relationship between sexuality and spirituality, and the proper place of celibacy within the occult tradition, as well as whether or not there was some form of "higher teaching" on these subjects that was known to only very few Theosophists. Leadbeater himself appears to have hinted at the latter, one

semiofficial History of the Theosophical Society noting that he had written to one boy in the 1906 case:

not only about his sex problems, but also on another matter of higher purport, the development of which was contingent not only on controlling the physical distress but also on the mental necessity of out-growing it. On the nature of this higher purpose Mr. Leadbeater was pledged to secrecy and did not divulge it however fierce the attack upon him or the misunderstanding of his motives, though to Mrs. Besant he admitted its existence.⁶⁸

If this was so, it seems probable that Leadbeater did have access to occult teachings on sex magic that refer to the magical properties of sexual fluids and ritualized sexual techniques, including that of “magical masturbation.” In that case, Leadbeater might have been advocating magical autosexual practices in which orgasm is associated with the release of great power.⁶⁹ This is certainly not something that he would have wanted to publicize. Furthermore, in an intriguing twist, it appears that Annie Besant was also familiar with (and perhaps even taught) some version of sex magic. A personal correspondent noted in a letter to her that she had stated and “put it as a fact before the esoteric section [of the Theosophical Society] . . . that excitement and misuse of the sexual organs leads to the acquirement of astral powers.”⁷⁰ It seems likely that there was an awareness of sex magic among a few key individuals within the Theosophical Society, if not direct teaching on the subject.

Not surprisingly, the Leadbeater affair did nothing to quell persistent rumors that the Theosophical Society and similar organizations were havens for homosexual men. The ambiguous gender persona of Madame Blavatsky, whom Olcott affectionately called “Jack”; the association of the Theosophical Society with feminism and causes like dress reform; its championing of celibacy; and the antipathy of leaders like Leadbeater to women all combined to give the impression that occultism attracted mannish women and effeminate men.⁷¹ The sexual implications of this were somewhat different for men and women. Close “romantic friendships” between women remained largely acceptable up to the First World War and beyond, mainly because female sexuality was generally perceived to be synonymous with heterosexuality. This was not the case with male sexuality. “Unnatural vice,” long a subtext of anti-Catholic feeling in Britain, was understood in worldly circles to refer to male homosexual behavior. The Labouchère Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 outlawed “any act of gross indecency” between men, whether in public or private, and the 1890s brought

a new awareness of homosexuality into the public domain. The sensational trials and prosecution of Oscar Wilde in the mid-1890s implicitly facilitated some discussion of homosexuality, however veiled, and many women as well as some men became aware of this variant of criminalized sexual behavior for the first time. Until that point, as the feminist Evelyn Sharp put it, homosexuality was “something of which I, in common, I believe, with numbers of my contemporaries, were entirely ignorant.” It was the Wilde trials that “set everybody talking about it in corners.”⁷² It is an irony, given the subsequent Leadbeater scandal, that Oscar Wilde as well as his wife, mother, and brother had each been attracted to Theosophy. Wilde attended Theosophical Society functions, and he and his mother were present at the initial meeting of Anna Kingsford’s Theosophical breakaway group; his wife, Constance, was briefly a member of both the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn; and his elder brother, Willie, was known to have visited Blavatsky.⁷³

It was not, however, simply a cause célèbre like the Wilde trials that introduced a late-Victorian public to homosexuality. The 1890s also saw the emergence of an elite articulation of homosexuality as a sexual identity in the work of pioneering sexologists like Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis.⁷⁴ Although this founding work in sexology reached a very limited audience, conceived primarily as medical and legal, it did have an impact. Havelock Ellis’s unambiguously titled *Sexual Inversion* was banned in 1898 in a prosecution brought under the Obscene Publications Act only a year after its publication, but his book together with that of Krafft-Ebing’s recently translated *Psychopathia Sexualis* helped to bring the concept of the homosexual into cultural circulation. In fact, it was the publicity surrounding the banning of Ellis’s book that did most to draw attention to “inversion.” These studies (while not the first to consider homosexuality) marked the beginning of a systematic, scientific attempt to categorize and understand sexual behaviors. Although this enterprise in effect medicalized homosexuality and constituted it as sexual pathology, both Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing were sexual progressives. Ellis collaborated with John Addington Symonds, a married homosexual who led a double life, on *Sexual Inversion*, and sought in his work to absolve homosexuality of its association with vice-ridden degeneracy. Instead, he noted in his case histories the intellectual and artistic propensities, high ethical tone, and sometimes refined religious sensibilities of many “inverts.”

This theme was reworked by Edward Carpenter (himself a homosexual) a decade later in his influential book *The Intermediate Sex*, which suggested that homosexuality might represent a truly progressive evolutionary form in

which masculinity and femininity find full expression in the “doubleness of nature.”⁷⁵ Carpenter’s message that individuals personifying this “intermediate” sex are potentially superior beings was a transforming conceptual move. Although gender is essentialized in his account, Carpenter’s argument that androgynous “doubleness” is linked to intuitive and psychic powers as well as intellectual prowess and subtlety of mind was tremendously appealing to those who recognized themselves in his work.⁷⁶ Furthermore, his notion of gendered androgyny played into the modern reworking of an occult tradition that refers to a race of hermaphroditical beings who, like the biblical Adam and Eve, existed in the world prior to a tragic Fall. Within fin-de-siècle occultism the traditional Hermetic motif of hermaphroditism was understood in gendered terms, and magical practice recognized the occult significance and desirability of masculine/feminine complementarity.

The quest for psychic androgyny is one reading of the alchemist’s project that advanced members of Anna Kingsford’s Hermetic Society, the Theosophical Society, and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn would have understood. Theosophists spoke of a spiritualized gendered androgyny in terms of the “Divine Hermaphrodite,” and William Wynn Westcott spelled out what this meant for aspiring members of the Golden Dawn’s Second Order:

Unless while with us you can conceive and act as both a sister and a brother at once, you will become a curse to yourself and a stumbling block unto us, unless you forget your sex,—by the holy Tetragrammaton I beseech you to be absent. We do not ask you to be unsexed in your private life, *that* is a stage necessary only in a far advanced grade, to which few may reach, but in our Order this qualification is an absolute necessity or you will get no encouragement to proceed farther than the threshold.⁷⁷

Although this aspiration to gender androgyny is a far cry from the kind of allegations that were made against Leadbeater, it did present the possibility of a somewhat different interpretation of a refined occult “intermediate” temperament that for some undoubtedly served to complicate the Leadbeater scenario. It was certainly an important aspect of Aleister Crowley’s privileging of gendered androgyny, although in his case this was tied inextricably to a celebratory and flamboyant bisexuality.⁷⁸

For all the tensions surrounding the issue of sexuality, Westcott’s admonition to Second Order Adepts “to be absent” in gendered terms “while with us” was taken seriously by advanced occultists. Whatever their attitudes in everyday life, occultists were aware that as Adepts they were engaged in an

endeavor that regarded the relationship between gender and spirituality in very specific terms. One aspect of this was the psychic androgyny that Adepts recognized as an occult goal, but another was the kind of theological feminism developed and espoused by Anna Kingsford. She certainly thought of herself as a female prophet with an ancient spiritual pedigree, and believed absolutely in the power and spiritual prestige of women. But although she was informed by her spiritual guides and teachers that the world “shall be redeemed by a ‘woman,’” she was also encouraged to understand *woman* symbolically. While entranced, for example, she was given an interpretation of the biblical book of Esther that cast its heroine as “that spirit of love and interpretation which shall redeem the world.”⁷⁹ Kingsford embraced the notion of spiritual androgyny, urging male occultists to develop the “woman” within themselves, but equally linked this explicitly to the duality of the divine principle, or God. Again, although she was familiar with the Cabalistic and Swedenborgian interpretations of androgynous divinity—indeed, she and Maitland believed that they were continuing Swedenborg’s work—this recognition of divine duality also derived from her own visionary experiences. Kingsford’s theology, while learned in its way, was very much her own. The kind of gendered insight that she received while in a state of illumination is evidenced, for example, by her rapturous experience of God: “And now not as Man only do I behold Thee! For now Thou art to me as Woman. Lo, Thou art both. One, and Two also.”⁸⁰

Kingsford’s embracing of the concept of duality is evident in *The Perfect Way*, which she coauthored with Edward Maitland, and Maitland himself was deeply sympathetic to a theology that came close to heretical doctrines of the female Messiah. After her death he published some of Kingsford’s “illuminations” in his aptly named *Clothed with the Sun*, perhaps unaware that this apocalyptic referent had last been appropriated in Britain at the beginning of the century by the self-proclaimed female Messiah, Joanna Southcott.⁸¹ Equally it is not insignificant that MacGregor Mathers dedicated his *Kabbala Denudata* to Kingsford and Maitland, readily acknowledging the spiritual debt. In an introduction redolent of the Kingsford-Maitland message, Mathers explains that “of the persons and attributes of God . . . *some are male and some female*,” noting that “the translators of the Bible have carefully crowded out of existence and smothered up every reference to the fact that the Deity is both masculine and feminine.” Furthermore, unlike many conventional Swedenborgians, who resisted the equation of spiritual androgyny with social equality, Mathers emphasized that according to the Cabala “*woman is equal with man, and certainly not inferior to him*, as it has been the persistent endeavour of so-called Christians to make her.”⁸²

Although we do not know precisely how he defined equality between the sexes, Mathers sought both in theological and practical terms to press the claims of women as well as those of the feminine. William Wynn Westcott similarly set the tone of Golden Dawn teaching when he referred to the erasure, "with baneful results," of all female connotations of "ideas of the higher powers," and was not afraid to collaborate in the Great Work with the sexually progressive Florence Farr.⁸³ What mattered in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was the quality of Adeptship regardless of sexual difference or even (within limits) a certain degree of sexual nonconformity. Ultimately it was the magic that counted.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the occult world both registered and was to some extent engaged with the renegotiation of gender and sexual identities that have come to be so closely associated with the fin de siècle. And, as might be expected, occult societies evinced the same anxieties and divisions around questions of gender and sexuality that fractured the general cultural landscape. There clearly was a progressive sexual element within occult circles, as well as a nonjudgmental ethic in such matters fostered by leaders like MacGregor Mathers; but sexuality in particular represented a potentially explosive issue that threatened to disrupt occult organizations even as occultists sought in their magical lives to mediate its distinctions and effects. As the Leadbeater case indicates, British occultism was often very much concerned with moral standards and sexual propriety, and a sexual scandal was capable of splitting and depleting the organizational ranks.⁸⁴ Those rigidly conventional middle-class occultists whom Aleister Crowley and Maud Gonne in their different ways found so dispiriting would have been among those who echoed the medical establishment's condemnation of Edward Carpenter's *Intermediate Sex* as "advocating the culture of unnatural and criminal practices."⁸⁵ For such occultists there was a clear distinction to be drawn between an occult aspiration to gender androgyny and the "criminal practices" of a Leadbeater or a Wilde. A leading exemplar of the dichotomization of the occult and temporal in such matters was J. W. Brodie-Innes, an important Theosophist and head of the Golden Dawn's Amen-Ra Temple in Edinburgh, who was uneasy about anything that smacked of "inversion" even though he could speak knowledgeably about the occult goal of spiritual androgyny. He was to resign his Golden Dawn office in sympathy with Horniman and Yeats in 1902, but otherwise had more in common with the former than the latter.

By extension, Horniman and Yeats themselves, allies in the political machinations within the Golden Dawn, were hardly in sympathy over issues of sexual politics. W. B. Yeats, while abhorring Aleister Crowley and his du-

bious sexual reputation, nevertheless moved in a literary and artistic circle that was suffused with homosexuality. He rallied support for Oscar Wilde when his fellow artist and countryman was coming to trial in 1895, and shortly afterwards was involved with the daring new magazine the *Savoy*—a title which many took to be a reference to the now-notorious hotel frequented by Wilde and his male lovers. Similarly, Florence Farr was responsible in 1898 for the acclaimed first production in England of Oscar Wilde's evocative (and banned) play, *Salomé*, which had been published several years earlier with erotic Aubrey Beardsley illustrations.⁸⁶ But while Farr's own novel *The Dancing Faun* was graced by Beardsley's work, others of her magical cohort would have viewed his explicitly sexual and androgynous creations as symptomatic of a loathsome perversity. It is hard to imagine Annie Horniman tolerating either Beardsley or Wilde, and Annie Besant, suggesting that even Blavatsky could be fallible in such matters, was to remark during the Leadbeater crisis: "I heard her warmly invite Oscar Wilde to come into the T. S. at the very time when, as afterwards proved, he was practising the nameless abominations that landed him in jail."⁸⁷ Besant, who had earlier championed the dissemination of information about birth control, and was to reinstate Leadbeater in spite of the damaging allegations concerning "nameless abominations," nevertheless understood the price of a public endorsement of Wilde. Theosophists might be able to explain "inversion" in spiritual terms, but Wilde, for all his interest in Theosophy, was not an Adept, thereby putting him into a quite different category from that of the psychically gifted Leadbeater. Inevitably, too, the occult leadership had an eye to the maintenance of consensus and discipline in organizations that already suffered from a surfeit of factionalism.

Sexual politics thus created perilous cross-currents in the already choppy waters of fin-de-siècle occultism. A progressive position on one issue did not guarantee consistency across the board when it came to sexual radicalism, and the majority of occultists were very far from being sexual progressives. But remarkably, in spite of the disagreements and sexual scandals, what occultism sought in an uneasy accommodation with temporal attitudes was that highly prized psychic androgyny of which Wynn Westcott had spoken when he said: "forget your sex. . . . I beseech you to be absent." This "forgetting" referred to both sexual difference and gendered identity, and translated in occult terms into a mental universe in which masculinity and femininity are held in perfect equilibrium. The absence of Wynn Westcott's "you"—or, more accurately, of the temporal gendered "I"—was an important occult goal, and one that was difficult to achieve. Even the majority of those Adepts who did achieve psychic androgyny were not expected, as

Westcott said, to become “unsexed” in their private lives. And yet, ambitious and difficult as this process of finessing the gendered “I” might be, it was only one aspect of an occultism that centrally concerned itself with acknowledging and redefining what is commonly understood by the self. Occultists were caught up in an investigation of the personal self that pushed not only at gender boundaries but at the very concept of a bounded and discrete individuality. Indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, fin-de-siècle occultism was concerned with an interrogation of self that not only marked its modernity but also spoke to the spiritual aspirations of a newly conceptualized subject worthy of the approaching new age.

CHAPTER FOUR

Modern Enchantment and the Consciousness of Self

The kind of occultism that was taught and practiced at the fin de siècle laid great stress on an esoteric understanding of “the constitution of man,” which emphasized interiority and was underwritten by a highly structured account of human consciousness. This occult account operated in dialogue with a concurrent innovative theorizing of the mind, but at the same time it refused a purely secularized formulation of human consciousness and sought to advance both the concept and experience of self as inherently spiritual and potentially divine. Occultism as it was developed at the turn of the century was therefore deeply involved in an elaboration of self that worked to reconcile the secular and spiritual, just as the occult goal of perfect self-realization was construed in social as well as spiritual (in fact, Rosicrucian) terms. Similarly, the self-realization of which occultism spoke was symptomatic of both the bourgeois self-consciousness and self-determination that have been so closely associated with post-Enlightenment subjectivity and the “transcendental” interiority of the nineteenth-century Romantic and allied movements. This was an occult preoccupation with self that looked within for the means of transcending the phenomenal world and accessing the spiritualized manifestations of an occluded reality. The “powers of the interior man” were what the new occultism concerned itself with, and these “powers” were conceived in purely psychologized terms.¹ In its attention to interiority occultism echoed certain aspects of “decadent” Romanticism, but, like the medical psychology of the day, it sought to elucidate a rationalized self-consciousness stripped of Romantic excess and interpreted according to the conventions of modern science.

Interiority, of course, is nothing new. The sense of an experiential inner self is evident in the documented inward-looking spiritual *travails* of early medieval Europe, and scholars are now skeptical of Burckhardt’s influential

assertion that elite (male) Renaissance Italy was the crucible of the self-aware “spiritual individual.” On the other hand, Renaissance scholars acknowledge a different emphasis on self that emerged between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. This is not to say that the “self-fashioning” of which we have recently heard so much bears any relation to the interiority of modern experience, but it is certainly the case that European humanism forged a new discourse of self that sought distance from a theological emphasis on guilt and repositioned the human individual within God’s universe. This repositioning, however, retained a spiritual dimension as integral to a self-reflective sense of the “I,” and the experience of the self remained intimately interwoven with both Catholic and Protestant practices of pious introspection throughout the early modern period.

Similarly, the idea of an interiorized self was never far removed from theological considerations, and it is notable that when the term *selfhood* entered the English lexicon in the midseventeenth century, it did so in the context of discussion of the ideas of Jacob Boehme. But it was precisely this spiritualized aspect of selfhood that was implicitly challenged in the seventeenth century when René Descartes and John Locke began in their different ways to explore the meaning and possibilities of the conscious autonomous self. The attempt to identify the self with the conscious thinking “I,” and to distinguish it from anything approaching the notion of the soul, has been one of the enduring hallmarks of post-Enlightenment culture. It is a self conceived as mind and consciousness that became the locus of attention during the nineteenth century, and it is this newly imagined self that must be placed at the center of narratives of cultural modernity.²

It is just this self, a self harking back to the Lockean premise that the “I” is constituted through consciousness and memory, that emerged from the late nineteenth-century colonization of the self by medical psychologists and the new sciences of the mind.³ This newly psychologized self represented an assault on what were perceived as the speculative formulations of theologians and philosophers. Gone was the sense of the self as a transcendental entity, a single applied consciousness conceived in the tradition of affective individualism but one with an everlasting aspect—the soul. In its place was a variously conceived but invariably fragmented or multiple self, formulated through complex processes of remembering and forgetting, and one in which the conscious “I” of the moment is inherently unreliable or unstable—certainly one in which the geography of self shifted dramatically as attention was redirected from a higher, timeless, or divine aspect to the subterranean, temporal, and mundane foundations of human personality. In this model the idea of rationality as that which illuminates and brings cohe-

sion to the whole—the reasoning “I” of post-Enlightenment political and economic “man”—was replaced by a sense of the limits of rationality and the impossibility of integrating all those elements signified by the self in one illuminated moment. At the very least, the psychologized self as it emerged at the turn of the century appears to be characterized by the exchange of a nonrational spiritual dimension (the soul) for a secularized irrational (the unconscious) as integral to the process of self-constitution.

And yet the shift to a psychologized self was implicated in all kinds of different ways in those fraught attempts to redefine a Christian worldview that we associate so strongly with the late-Victorian period. Certainly fin-de-siècle occultism was centrally concerned with a renegotiation of self that sought an accommodation with a unifying and transcendental spirituality even as it underscored the self’s multiplicity and contingency. The concept of the occult self as it emerged at the turn of the century was conceived in the context of the timeless teachings of the “ancient wisdom” but was predicated on a modern elision of self and consciousness that underwrote the most recent formulations of subjectivity. Equally, as we shall see, the occult account of the self shared some prehistory with the aggressively secular sciences of the mind, while certain occult assumptions shaded imperceptibly into the concerns of an avant-garde philosophy. And, ultimately, even as it resisted a secularized formulation of human consciousness, the intensive occult investigation of self was deeply committed to a rationalized experience of the spiritual that accorded with the most advanced work in the field of the human sciences. However anxiously the boundaries were patrolled on both sides, the spiritualized investments of occultism were closely related in content and method to some of the key secular undertakings of the day. This symbiotic relationship between the spiritual and secular, as exemplified by the occult self at the fin de siècle, is illustrative of the way in which occultism constituted a crucial enactment of the ambiguities of “the modern.”

The interconnectedness of spiritual and secular at the turn of the century, so often overlooked by historians, was uppermost in the minds of some of the period’s most insightful contemporaries. Holbrook Jackson was keenly aware of it, emphasizing the visionary quality of the 1890s and identifying spirituality where religion was technically absent. His discussion of the “decadent” artistic and literary movement that he argued set the tone of those years, personified in Britain by Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley, emphasizes the close correspondence between what he called “physical excess” and “spiritual desire.” “All the cynicisms and petulances and flippancies of the decadence,” he writes, “the febrile self-assertion, the voluptuousness, the perversity were, consciously or unconsciously, efforts towards the

rehabilitation of spiritual power.” Decadence itself, he argued, was a form of “soul-sickness” for which mysticism was the only cure. For Jackson, the so-called Yellow Nineties (named for the periodical *The Yellow Book*, with its infamous Beardsley illustrations) recognized the failures and “the folly of salvation by morality and salvation by reason.” By his reckoning, “the unsatisfied spirit of the age” looked beyond established moral codes and the restrictive practices of rationalism, and the 1890s marked “the beginning of the revolt against rationalism and the beginning of the revival of mysticism.”⁴

For Jackson, the 1890s was the decade during which the revolt against disenchantment in all its rationalized dimensions got seriously under way. The cultural mood that he identified was related to a European “breath of spirit,” and similarly valorized the fruits of imagination and intuition. It foreshadowed the enormous influence in Britain of Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche, and established a tone and atmosphere in which matters of the spirit took on a new relevance and urgency. Jackson associated “the revolt against rationalism” with “the revival of mysticism,” suggesting that one paved the way for the other, but it was no simple phenomenon that he outlined. In particular, the cultural mood that Jackson identified was for him associated with a “Transcendental View of Social Life,” and while his use of the term *transcendental* is perhaps loosely applied, it has specific connotations that *mysticism* lacks.⁵ Jackson had in mind a specifically Emersonian metaphysics that combined rejection of Puritan orthodoxies and an attack on materialistic philistinism with the concept of self-realization. It was this “idea of self-realisation, as old as Emerson, and older,” Jackson states, that “was at the root of the modern attitude.” If “the modern attitude” is itself a slippery concept, and Jackson notes the contemporary preference for *fin de siècle* or *new* “to indicate extreme modernity,” his observation nevertheless goes straight to the heart of the matter.⁶ A “soul-sickness” akin to the reification and alienation of Marxist analysis is posited here as intrinsic to the newly problematized subjectivity of high modernity, and an oppositional ideal of transcendent self-realization is promoted not only as an antidote but also as a defining motif of avant-garde culture at the turn of the century.

Emersonian Transcendentalism is indeed an appropriate referent for the fin-de-siècle “mystical revival.” As conceived in New England during the earlier half of the century, Transcendentalism was itself a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism that privileged intuitive spiritual experience and legitimated a mystical oneness with God and the natural world. Ralph Waldo Emerson had been exposed to German idealism and a particular Romantic tradition through his friendship with Carlyle, Wordsworth, and Co-

leridge, and he brought to his admiration for Plato and the Neoplatonists a deep interest in the sacred literatures of the East. As an eclectic school of thought with mystical experience at its center, Transcendentalism was in many ways a prescient forerunner of late-Victorian “mysticism.” Added to this, however, was the earlier movement’s reliance on the doctrine of correspondences, a belief in a direct correspondence between the phenomenological world and the human mind and, similarly, the identification of the individual soul with God, which was basic to so much of fin-de-siècle occultism. The ultimate, even divine, authority of a potentially transcendent self suggested by an immanentist doctrine of correspondences lay at the heart of much of the new “mysticism,” and was perfectly attuned to the idea that “the highest of all things” is (as Holbrook Jackson put it) “the self, the individual ego.”⁷ The notion that it is the “ego” that constitutes the ultimate or “highest” authority was to gain momentum during the first decade of the twentieth century, when the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Stirner gained wider exposure, but it was already part of the audacious intellectual currency of the 1890s.⁸ A new self-consciousness, a preoccupation with consciousness and self that manifested itself in some of the leading artistic work, thought, and inquiry of the day, was the hallmark of the fin-de-siècle “modern.”

An acute cultural critic like Holbrook Jackson was aware that behind much of the intellectual and cultural ferment that marked the 1890s lay a new attitude towards what we would now call issues of subjectivity. For him, the “idea of self realisation” lay at the heart of “the modern attitude.” Later in the century, and with the benefit of hindsight, what Jackson had defined as the fin-de-siècle expression of “extreme modernity” came to be seen as part of a broader and “distinct stylistic phase” in literature and the arts known as Modernism. For all the continuities and discontinuities in the catalogue of international Modernist production, Modernism is usually taken to be typified by “a new consciousness, a fresh condition of the human mind.” Literary critics discuss this “fresh condition of the human mind” in terms of an awareness of the “multiplicity of consciousness,” the kind of “quickened, multiplied consciousness” to which Walter Pater referred in the 1870s but which became emblematic of cultural modernity at the fin de siècle.⁹ New work in European literature and drama that emphasized the complexities of individual psychologies, and the “split and vacillating,” “uncertain, disintegrated” human figures who were increasingly to populate the modern landscape, now seized the imagination of the British avant garde.¹⁰ By the early 1900s a generation of British, French, and American writers were seeking to probe the inner lives of their characters, emphasizing the

distinction between appearance and reality, and the differences between perceived time and space and the temporal geography of the psyche. They did so in part through those "strategies of inwardness" that literary critics associate so closely with the canonical lexicon of literary Modernism as they elaborated, often in experimental but also in disciplined and recognizable form, the opaque, elusive, mysterious inner world of the self.¹¹

At the turn of the century, however, these developments were only one aspect of a broader investigation of the nature of consciousness, memory, experience, and sensation that was to manifest itself more broadly than in an aestheticized "modern attitude." This was most readily apparent in the explosion of interest in questions of psychic subjectivity that occurred during the later decades of the nineteenth century as the complex issue of how the "I" is constituted came under scrutiny from a generation of international medical psychologists. As a British readership wrestled with the insights of a European medical psychology intent on probing the mysteries of the mind, explanatory models that relied for their efficacy on the concept of a single, stable consciousness as the authorial root of behavior and meaning began to seem outmoded and inadequate. If, as the work of the French psychologists Jean-Martin Charcot, Hippolyte Bernheim, and Pierre Janet seemed to indicate, a patient could manifest a series of distinct and discrete personalities, each unaware of the others, it seemed to suggest that parts of the mind are unavailable to conscious self-scrutiny. At this moment Sigmund Freud was working towards the theorization of a dynamic model of the mind that stressed the relative importance of conscious awareness, and others, too, were postulating a psyche that might best be understood in terms of division and fragmentation. Increasingly it began to appear that the mind might be a vast labyrinth, possibly only ever partially knowable, and possessed of a hidden but frighteningly powerful realm that interacted with everyday consciousness. What all of this amounted to was an implied assault on the undisputed authority of the autonomous self as personified by the "I" of personal identity. The researches of the 1880s and 1890s had the effect of postulating a new and unstable subjectivity that bore only a passing resemblance to the dominant Enlightenment concept of the unified rational subject. It is the emergence of this "new" subjectivity, and its mapping as a Modernist theme, that might seem to suggest that the turn of the new century marked the moment in which the "human character changed."¹²

By 1900 a commonality of themes exemplified not only by a new interest in and awareness of the complexity of mind and selfhood, but also by the complications wrought by an appreciation of the subjectivity of cognition, began to manifest itself across the disciplines concerned with human behav-

ior and values. Reason and Science, those arbiters of modern moral and intellectual authority, were themselves being reevaluated in the light of new intellectual trends that emphasized the preeminence of subjective interpretation. Indeed, while traditional religious belief had been subjected to harsh examination in some quarters and been found wanting, it was also clear that the crude antireligious charges and ambitions of a militant scientific positivism were not shared unconditionally by the scientific community and even seemed somewhat old fashioned by the end of the century. The positivist reliance on an ethos of scientific objectivity now came under attack, while a questioning of cognitive absolutes in turn raised concerns about the contingency of “truth” and the role of subjective appraisal in determining the codes by which life is understood and lived. At the same time, a new appreciation of the complexity of the human mind, coupled with developments in sociology, psychology, and philosophy that stressed the interrelationship of subject and object, brought into question the concept of an irreducible reality existing independently of human perception and understanding. What H. Stuart Hughes referred to as “the problem of consciousness,” and identified with an “intellectual revolution” that began in the 1890s, lay at the heart of much of this innovative inquiry and debate.¹³ What cognitive modernism in the human sciences shared with idealist philosophy and canonical Modernism was a preeminent concern with consciousness and the modern experience of self. And it is this engagement with self-consciousness that some scholars have called the “truly central insight of modernity.”¹⁴

It was in this intellectual and cultural climate that a “mystical revival” that was preeminently concerned with “the interior man” occurred. Moreover, there was a significant overlap among the conceptual focus of those who steeped themselves in occult writings and participated directly in related occult practices, that of psychical researchers intent on the objective investigation of occult or paranormal phenomena, and medical psychologists who were interested in altered mental states and cases of dual or multiple personality. The close connection between the intellectual preoccupations of members of the late-Victorian Society for Psychical Research and those of European medical psychologists is clear; that several of the most renowned international psychologists, including Hippolyte Bernheim, Pierre Janet, Charles Richet, Cesare Lombroso, Albert Freiherr von Schrenck-Notzing, William James, and subsequently, Sigmund Freud, were associated with the SPR speaks for itself.¹⁵ What is perhaps less obvious is that, unlike the great majority of spiritualists, the *fin-de-siècle* occultists were not resistant to the idea that occult phenomena or magical powers rep-

resented a manifestation of the little-understood power of the mind. Spiritualists, of course, were hostile to any suggestion that spirit communications originated within the mind rather than from a separate entity outside it, but not so the new occultists. They had little problem with the proposition offered by the British psychical researcher Frederic W. H. Myers, who suggested that a medium might exhibit not so much supernatural powers as a special "subliminal consciousness," which was capable of tapping into the minds of others. The occult endeavor was increasingly represented by the new occultists as an interiorized undertaking that took the form of a preeminent inquiry into the meaning and mutuality of self and consciousness. Indeed, occultism at the fin de siècle was deeply invested in an elision of the concepts of consciousness and self and was intent on exploring what occultists took to be the limitless spiritual potential of that personal consciousness.

At the turn of the century, then, there were—for all the disagreements over the precise meaning of mediumistic behavior and the issue of occult reality itself—some shared interests and a broad paradigmatic agreement among medical psychologists, psychical researchers, and the new occultists, which stood in clear contrast with the earlier fraught exchanges between spiritualists and "researchers," or skeptics of any stripe. Spiritualists not only resisted the idea that spirit communications originated in the mind of the medium, they were also suspicious of complex notions of the self and espoused the idea of a single temporal self, which passed in death from the earthly body to the spirit Summerland.¹⁶ The new occultists, on the other hand, while accepting the existence on other planes of spirit life, worked with a complex notion of self and accorded a central place to the role of what they called "self-consciousness" in the attainment of spiritual wisdom and perfect "consciousness of Being." This occult "self-consciousness" combined a secularized notion of self as consciousness with a carefully differentiated account of selves both temporal and divine. The crucial distinction, therefore, between the secular sciences of mind and occultism (with psychical research often roughly bridging the two positions) is that an occult understanding of personal consciousness was always articulated in metaphysical terms.

Human consciousness was spiritualized by an occult philosophy that distinguished between a temporal and divine self. So that whereas Theosophists, for example, understood the self as consciousness, they insisted on a clear distinction between the earthly "personal Self," or "personal Ego" (the "I") and a timeless "permanent Self," or "Spiritual Ego," which is continuously incarnated in human form until finally perfected and released from

the wheel of karma. According to Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the personal Self or Ego represents merely the temporary personality of a particular human incarnation. It is the Permanent Self, that which survives death to be continuously incarnated, which constitutes “the real individuality”—the “real” self.¹⁷ But Madame Blavatsky also spoke of an impersonal and ungendered Higher Self, a third self, and this was a concept which assumed great importance in fin-de-siècle occult circles. The Higher Self was represented in strict Theosophical terms as the universally diffused “divine principle” within every human being and akin to that spark of divinity which signifies “the God within us.” The Theosophical Higher Self, then, is “one with the Universal Soul or Mind” and constitutes an inner manifestation of “the Universal Spirit.”¹⁸ Theosophists knew the importance of reaching an understanding of the Higher Self, and advanced occultists within the Theosophical Society recognized that their goal was experience of “the God within.”

Many of the senior members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn similarly conceived of what the Order variously referred to as the Higher (sometimes Highest) Self, Angelic Self, or Genius as a God-like Self that must be nurtured and developed through advanced occult practice. The Golden Dawn taught its senior Adepts how to achieve what the Order called knowledge of or “conversation” with the Higher Self, and underlined the importance of a complete awareness of the implications of self as a prelude to approaching not only “the God within” but divinity itself. One Golden Dawn teaching document states that “Perfect knowledge of Self is required in order to attain Knowledge of Divinity, for when you can know the God of yourself it will be possible to obtain a dim vision of the God of All.”¹⁹ The Second Order’s intense meditative technique of the Middle Pillar, in which the magician ascended the Tree of Life, was dedicated to accomplishing this union of the human and divine, and specific rituals like that of the Rose Cross were designed to induce a mode of consciousness conducive to such undertakings. The ultimate goal of communion with the Higher Self and the related transformative experience of union with the divine were what magicians meant when they spoke of the Great Work. Thus, in one of their rituals, Second Order Adepts would intone: “I desire the attainment of the knowledge and conversation of my higher and Divine Genius, the summum bonum, true wisdom and perfect happiness, the power of the great transformation.”²⁰ Here, as often in Golden Dawn practice, the Higher Self is referred to as the “Genius,” and in general the rich interrelatedness of occult personnel meant that the concept of a Higher Self (like that of God) underwent various changes. Nevertheless, all serious students of the

occult understood that occult study and practice were in part dedicated to the full knowledge and understanding of “Self” in each of its different manifestations. This was summed up in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn by the Renaissance admonition to “Know Thyself.”²¹

The pursuit of a complete understanding of self was one reason why some serious occultists became interested in alchemy, one of the foremost arts of the Renaissance occult tradition and an integral aspect of Rosicrucianism. Although W. T. Stead’s popular occult quarterly *Borderland*, in reviewing a pamphlet on the subject, commented that it was “difficult to see upon what grounds Alchemy should continue to be brought forward at this time,” there was a flourishing interest in the topic within certain occult circles.²² A few scattered publications on alchemy during the first half of the nineteenth century became a steady if small stream after the 1870s, and interest as reflected in the market for allied works continued beyond the post-war years.²³ Clearly Theosophists and magicians were part of the new constituency of “inquirers.” Madame Blavatsky addressed the philosophy of alchemy in *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, and several influential Theosophists were interested in the subject. According to Isabelle de Steiger, Mrs. Atwood (the author of a “mystical” midcentury book on alchemy) bequeathed her father’s valuable alchemical library to the prominent Theosophist A. P. Sinnett for use by the members of the Theosophical Society. One of the first to take advantage of the acquisition was G. R. S. Mead, the private secretary to Blavatsky who went on to form the Quest Society.²⁴ The redoubtable Madame de Steiger herself, who passed from spiritualism to Theosophy, and thence to the Christian Hermeticism of Anna Kingsford before joining the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and ultimately A. E. Waite’s breakaway group, wrote on the subject of alchemy and was influential in the founding of the Alchemical Society with Waite and others in 1912.²⁵ Waite was publishing editions of classic alchemical texts from the 1880s, while the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn introduced its initiates to alchemical concepts and attracted enthusiastic alchemists such as the Reverend W. A. Ayton.²⁶

It is difficult to determine precisely what the Golden Dawn in its official capacity taught on alchemy, but it is clear that a strong alchemical theme ran through its rituals and ceremonial instruction. The Order’s “Z. 2.” document explicitly sought to establish a relationship between the initiation ritual of its most junior Neophyte Grade and alchemical practice, and the Reverend Ayton apparently gave private instruction in practical alchemy to Second Order Adepts. He and Florence Farr both had access to some of Frederick Hockley’s relevant manuscripts, and Percy Bullock, a senior

Adept, owned Hockley's 1829 alchemical text, *Journal of a Rosicrucian Philosopher*.²⁷ Furthermore, the Golden Dawn tradition as it has survived in New Zealand (under the original auspices of Dr. Robert William Felkin and his wife) speaks of two kinds of alchemy—metallic and herbal—as having been taught in the Victorian Order. Florence Farr and Dr. Edward Berridge were apparently particularly interested in the latter, Berridge (a homeopath) because of his interest in the medicinal use of herbs. Farr was more concerned with an astral connection with plants and herbs, the correspondences, for example, between the natural world and invisible or planetary forces, and seemingly experimented in this field and wrote on the topic.²⁸ If, as seems likely, Farr was working in the tradition that was perpetuated by Dr. Felkin, she would have accepted that “Magic in alchemy is the concentration of life's energies through the Will, manipulating and working in harmony the vibrations of creation of our planet with the cosmic forces that be, into a desired object.”²⁹ In other words, she would have been interested in the process whereby great power is infused into a particular nostrum or substance, effectively transmuting it and thereby turning it into a highly charged magical property. This, however, is only one reading of alchemy. As A. E. Waite recognized, it has both a chemical and a spiritual form. The former is concerned with a process of transmutation of matter, while the latter addresses the spiritual perfection of the human individual.³⁰ Furthermore, these can operate simultaneously and even coterminously.

Advanced occultists at the turn of the century were clearly exposed to an occult tradition in which the traditional preoccupation of the alchemist, the “chemical” transmutation of base metal into gold, is seen as synonymous with the “spiritual” raising of the individual to a divine state. The fact that there were those in the Golden Dawn who cautioned against a too “spiritual” interpretation reinforces the sense that senior Adepts were taught (either formally or informally) that alchemy represents an allegory for the cultivation of the highest Self.³¹ These occultists subscribed to a “spiritual” reading of alchemy, which teaches that the alchemical narrative of the search for the philosopher's stone, the key to turning base metals into silver and gold, is actually a coded account of the development of a perfected Self similar to that of the Golden Dawn's highest Self and the Theosophical “God within us.”

Florence Farr, who studied alchemy with the Reverend Ayton, discussed alchemy in just these terms in her introduction to a seventeenth-century alchemical text. She warned her readers that the work does not “contain a treatise on the transmutation of metals. It is rather . . . a guide to the attainment of that perfection of mind and body, which has been called by some,

the achievement of Adeptship.”³² After she had left the Golden Dawn for the Theosophical Society, Florence Farr returned to her theme. She reminded her audience that both Rosicrucianism and alchemy are allegories and that alchemical symbolism points to the timeless continuity of the “real self,” which “is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever.” What alchemy offers, she suggested, is an understanding of the realities of the self and a symbolic account of the means by which the occultist can attain a state of enlightened perfection. Adopting the imagery of traditional alchemy, Farr argued that an ultimate consciousness of self achieved through the refining processes of occult practice is one of the highest goals of the Adept: “consciousness of Being is the name we give to the white tincture which the adept distils from his human form in the alembic of the mind.”³³

Mind and consciousness are the crucial terms here, although Farr also hints at the importance of embodiment for an occult “consciousness of Being.” However, the notion of an all-encompassing consciousness as an essence distilled from the “human form” was not meant to suggest a materialist interpretation of mind. Occultists tended to acknowledge the interrelationship of mind and body while resisting any theory that reduced either mind or consciousness to the mechanistic workings of the brain. They argued for the autonomy of mind, and regarded consciousness as a mental field that could not be correlated with physiological or neurological functions. On the other hand, as Farr indicated, occultists were well aware of mind-body interaction in the production of “consciousness of Being.” Advanced occultists were taught the various techniques through which such consciousness was achieved—meditation, incantation, and forms of self-hypnotism, for example—each of which was deemed to require the creative partnership of mind and body. The use of meditative and self-hypnotic techniques was an important means of achieving those changed mental states that were so central to magical practice, and the latter represented a modern reworking of an earlier association between mesmerism and ritual magic that had been a feature of some late eighteenth-century French Masonic lodges.³⁴

Within the Golden Dawn, senior Adepts claimed an ancient pedigree for the connection between hypnotism and magic. As Farr commented, “it is very easy to see that a great part of Egyptian Magic lay in a species of hypnotism, called by later magicians, Enchantment, Fascination, and so forth.”³⁵ Both Dr. Felkin and Dr. Charles Lloyd Tuckey, a physician and homeopath who was briefly a member of the Order in the mid-1890s, were keenly interested in hypnotism and wrote (in the case of Tuckey, influentially) on the subject.³⁶ Both the Golden Dawn and Theosophical Society

concerned themselves with the self-willed (as opposed to a “passive” mediunistic) trance state, and worked on meditative and self-hypnotic techniques in order to achieve changed levels of consciousness and, ultimately, perfect “consciousness of Being.”

Crucially, however, the new occultists believed that a fully realized “consciousness of Being” implies both conscious mental process and an understanding of the limits of everyday self-awareness. For them, a fully elaborated consciousness involves far more than an awareness and interiorized experience of that mundane self which we call the “I.” The new occultism understood consciousness as multifaceted, and emphasized a multiplicity of selves that are represented and manifested at different levels of consciousness. Annie Besant asserted that an understanding of the full implications of consciousness was one of the major lessons of occultism, and in her role as leader of the Theosophical Society promoted the view that occult study was the route to a full and complete knowledge of the mysteries of both self and the cosmic or universal “Mind.” As Theosophical teaching evolved after Blavatsky’s death it stressed the unity of consciousness while explicating its different manifestations. Besant taught that those unschooled in esotericism have only limited awareness of the full potential of human consciousness, and mistakenly assume that a unifocal “waking-consciousness” is fully synonymous with self-consciousness in all its manifestations. She associated this limited waking state with the brain, the physical organ of “mind,” assuming that full self-consciousness could never be so defined or confined. In “the average man,” she wrote, “the brain is the only part in which consciousness has definitely become Self-consciousness, the only part in which he feels himself as ‘I,’ and asserts himself as a separate individual unit.”³⁷ Like all Theosophists and many other serious occultists, Besant was acutely aware that Eastern religions had long been familiar with the operation of different states of what she called “super-consciousness,” or “the consciousness above the waking consciousness.” The Theosophical Society was not alone in teaching the techniques of yoga and meditation as a means to an exalted state of “occult” awareness, but Annie Besant did not confine her interest to a “mystical” Eastern tradition. She was also extremely interested in contemporary Western developments in medical psychology. She was perfectly *au fait* with European studies of multiple personality and trance states, and clearly followed the kind of research that was being conducted at the Salpêtrière by Pierre Janet during the course of the 1890s. Besant readily acknowledged the seemingly parallel preoccupations of psychology and occultism, but equally asserted the critical distinctions between the two.

1. Anna Kingsford (ca. 1884), the year in which she founded the Hermetic Society. Reprinted from *Anna Kingsford: Her Life, Letters, Diary and Work by her collaborator Edward Maitland*, ed. Samuel Hopgood Hart, vol. 1, 3d ed. (London: John M. Watkins, 1913).



2. Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1889) as British Theosophists would have known her. By permission of The Theosophical Society in America.



3. Annie Besant (1885) in her secularist campaigning days. By permission of The Theosophical Society in America.



4. Annie Besant in Indian robes (1893). By permission of The Theosophical Society in America.

5. Dr. William Wynn Westcott (nineteenth century), coroner, Freemason, and one of the founders of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.



6. A portrayal of Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, autocratic Chief of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.
Photograph courtesy the University of Reading.



7. Florence Farr (ca. 1890) about the time that she was initiated into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Reprinted from Josephine Johnson, *Florence Farr: Bernard Shaw's "New Woman"* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Ltd., 1975). Courtesy of Josephine Johnson Collection.



8. Florence Farr (1894) in a publicity photograph for George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, in which she played Louka. *Pall Mall Budget*, 19 April 1894. Courtesy General Research Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.



9. An 1889 portrait of a bearded W. B. Yeats by Henry Marriott Paget. Paget was married to Florence Farr's sister, Henrietta, and both became involved with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Photograph courtesy the Ulster Museum.

10. W. B. Yeats (ca. 1890) much as he would have looked at the time of his initiation into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. His companion is probably Dr. John Todhunter, a family friend and neighbor who later became a member of the Order. Reprinted from R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). By permission of A.P. Watt Ltd on behalf of Michael B. Yeats.





11. Annie Horniman (1908), who rose to high office in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Photograph courtesy Arts Library Theatre Collection, Manchester Central Library.



12. Aleister Crowley ceremonially robed
as the Adept (ca. 1910). Courtesy Ordo
Templi Orientis.



13. Aleister Crowley (1912) in the mode
of the Beast 666. Courtesy Ordo
Templi Orientis.



14. Victor Neuburg (late 1920s), some years after his break with Aleister Crowley. Photograph courtesy of Jean Overton Fuller.

Besant stressed that while all but a few “advanced psychologists” tended to view anything other than the consciousness of the waking state as “abnormal,” “sub-conscious,” “inconscious,” and necessarily “disorderly,” the East (and, by implication, Theosophy) regarded such states as “higher than the waking state” and sought to reproduce them at will. Similarly, she suggested that while the trance produced by “hypnotic or medicinal means,” as “in the Salpêtrière and elsewhere,” effected changes in the physical body that were identical to those found in entranced Râja and Hâtha Yogîs, the differences “between the super-physical conditions of consciousness in the hypnotized subject and in the Yogî” are marked. Theosophy had its own means of attesting to these changes, but most significantly argued that “The Spiritual Man,” who accesses the trance state at will via a range of meditative techniques, moves, in direct contrast with the “sleeping” hypnotized subject, who “loses consciousness,” into a higher but fully self-conscious mode of being in which “he” can access planes beyond the earthly and temporal. She argued that the techniques of Râja Yoga in particular, “in which the consciousness is withdrawn from the brain by intense concentration, leads the student to continuity of consciousness on successive planes, and he remembers his super-physical experiences on his return to the waking state.”³⁸ Besant thus conceived of a fully realized self-consciousness not only in terms of the Adept’s ability to transcend the embodied brain-centered “waking consciousness” of the “I,” but also as the manifestation of a disembodied or otherly-bodied consciousness that can reach far beyond the plane of temporal existence.

Other occultists, while differing on the cosmological details, placed similar emphasis on gaining entry to nontemporal reality, and what this often amounted to in practice was the willed movement between different levels of consciousness that facilitated both the sense of a second “I” and an altered sense of the place inhabited by this different self. Fledgling magicians in the Golden Dawn, for example, were trained to move between two levels of consciousness, the magical and mundane, and experimented with a variety of self-hypnotic and ritualized techniques designed to produce this sense of a second initiated or magical self. Subsequently, Second Order Adepts (and later also members of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society) were instructed in the occult clairvoyant practice known as Astral Travel, which relied on the sense of a second “I” that represented in graphic terms the kind of expansive “I” envisaged by Annie Besant when she spoke of consciousness being withdrawn from the brain.

It was this second self that would explore what magicians called the Astral Light. This referred to the great web of otherworldly planes or orders of

existence that interpenetrate the world of earthly perceptions, and that can be accessed by those trained in the higher occult arts.³⁹ An occult elite were instructed in techniques that produced an intense sense of a personal double, a materialized replica of an embodied self, which left the temporal body of the occultist and journeyed at length in astral realms. Golden Dawn Adepts were taught how to formulate their own “Sphere of Astral Light,” which would replicate their person and, to a certain degree, initiated consciousness. In other words, a complete second self, conceived as a subtle replica of the original, was created in the mind, and it was this second self that traveled in the Astral Light. The astral self was therefore conceptualized in physical terms and possessed a consciousness of its own, even though it was subject to ultimate control by the magician’s will—the focused intent of the initiated or highest Self. In effect, what this type of magical practice taught was a highly refined system of dual or even triple consciousness. The mundane self, initiated magical self, and “Sphere of Astral Light” apparently operated at different levels of consciousness, and at the very least this exercise involved a double displacement of the “I” as a necessary preamble to travel in astral realms.

Astral Travel was based on the precept “Believe thyself to be in a place, and thou art there,” and the projection of a “Sphere of Astral Light” worked in conjunction with an accepted code of occult symbolism to effect an intense extraterrestrial experience.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Victorian Adepts were well aware that at one level Astral Travel was an interior journey conducted within the mind. Florence Farr acknowledged this when she said, “I suppose that there are thousands of people in England and as many millions elsewhere, who are trying in one way or another to learn that ancient art, taught by the wise from the beginning of recorded time, the Art of Guiding the Mind.”⁴¹ She and other involved senior occultists knew that practices like Astral Travel relied upon a series of intricate maneuvers of personal consciousness, just as they understood that the power of the structured imagination was crucial to the success of any magical undertaking—whether conceived as exploration of astral realms or in terms of more temporal concerns. In fact, what magicians referred to as “the magical process” was entirely underwritten by the power of the mind and of the prepared imagination. As Florence Farr noted, “In truth, Imagination is the power of forming images in our minds. . . . So begins the magical process, the rest is not for me to divulge.”⁴² What Farr refused to elaborate, believing that revelation would betray her Golden Dawn oath of secrecy, was that the application of specific techniques produced a heightened consciousness, or changed sense of “I,” and transformed the mundane into the magical self;

and an imagination attuned to complex symbolic representations of occult reality worked to create the vivid visualizations so necessary for effective practical magic. As magicians acknowledged, the “Cultivation of the imaginative faculty” and “means of attaining to intuition” are central to the attainment of magical or “supra-normal powers.”⁴³

This did not mean, however, that a powerful magical experience like the movement of a transformed sense of self across a range of nonearthly realms of existence was taken to be a purely imagined, subjective, or interiorized phenomenon. Far from it. Advanced occultists accepted that in theory as in practice, magic blurred the usual distinctions between real/unreal, inner/outer, and subjective/objective, while never doubting the absolute reality of the magical experience. Indeed, they conceived of the entire occult endeavor as the search for a veiled or hidden reality, but a reality that transcends temporal and seemingly physical limitations. Different occult groups each taught a form of psychospiritual metaphysics that emphasized the relationship between different aspects of the self and levels of otherworldly and divine consciousness. Occultists understood that teachings which spoke of the “Realization of the Microcosm as a representation of the Macrocosm” were directing attention to a direct correspondence between the fully realized “inner” kingdom of the self and the “outer” realities of the cosmos. Similarly, they recognized that the “merging of the Ego into the realm of Macrocosmic beings” referred to the interrelationship of “inner” and “outer.”⁴⁴ This, the correlation of the different inner worlds or levels of self-consciousness with the outer worlds of nontemporal reality, was one of the great secrets imparted to advanced occultists. And much advanced occult activity was dedicated to mapping this relationship as Adepts sought to perfect a disciplined, controlled, and fully self-realized consciousness capable of acknowledging and transversing the permeable boundary between the personal self and the spiritual “other” of the other world.

This was precisely the nature of the work that was carried out in those “Secret Groups” that caused so much trouble within the Second Order of the Golden Dawn at the turn of the century. In a letter written to J. W. Brodie-Innes in 1901, Florence Farr attempted to clarify and defend the role of her “Sphere” group and claim for it the imprimatur of Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers himself. The letter recalled that in 1895 Farr had encountered a high-ranking “Egyptian Adept in the British Museum,” how the meeting had opened up other “possibilities,” and the way in which MacGregor Mathers had given his written approval “of my working with her [the Adept], and saying that it was necessary to make offerings & then all would be well.” Farr, observing the “considerable prejudice against Eryp-

tian Symbolism amongst the members of the Order,” went on to recount how she had held her tongue about her own interests while encouraging the different constituencies within the Second Order (“Indian, Christian and so on”) to establish small working groups of their own. She then described the operation of her own twelve-member group: the way in which each member projected symbolism adapted from the Cabalistic Tree of Life onto a sphere that slowly increased in size until it encompassed the Order, the planet, and “the visible universe,” the purpose being to draw down the divine “Light” upon the known world of human existence.⁴⁵ As Annie Horniman was to add in denunciation of the “Sphere” group in 1902, “The twelve members had astral stations assigned to them around this sphere and a certain Egyptian astral form was supposed to occupy the centre.”⁴⁶ In other words, this was a form of Astral Travel in which Adepts moved around and took up positions within a vast cosmic globe with a view to concentrating “forces of growth, progress and purification” into the universe as we know it. Furthermore, this was a process that was controlled or overseen by an “Egyptian astral form,” although the Egyptian symbolism was later to change to that of the Christian Holy Grail.⁴⁷

These relatively brief accounts obscure the complexity of the process described. It was in fact akin to a complex mapping procedure practiced within the Golden Dawn whereby the microcosm (or body) of the Adept was conceived as the Tree of Life and projected onto the inside of a great translucent sphere, which was envisioned as encompassing the universe. The Adept then moved up and through the vast projected Tree of Life, which simultaneously mapped both the inner (microcosmic) surface of the sphere and the outer (macrocosmic), thus allowing the Adept to experience the inner world of self and corresponding outer cosmic realities simultaneously.⁴⁸ W. B. Yeats’s great fear, as expressed during the “Secret Groups” controversy, was that these intense visualization practices when carried out in small splinter groups created “centres of life, which are centres of death” to the “greater life” of the overall Order. He worried that these powerful smaller groups threatened the integrity of the Magical Order as a living organism with a life of its own, so as “to dislimn, to disembody, to dematerialize an Actual Being.”⁴⁹ Florence Farr could not agree with this, but she identified a different issue. The “Art of Guiding the Mind,” she wrote, and “those who study it, from whatever point of view, find that it has the compelling fascination common to all faithful Art, and that it gradually absorbs the very life of the devotee, so that he lives in it alone.”⁵⁰ This accords with the single-minded intensity with which Farr lived her magical life during the 1890s, and “Guiding the Mind” came to assume a similarly important (in-

deed addictive) aspect of occult practice for other senior Golden Dawn Adepts during this period. Farr saw these magical activities as part of the broader remit of alchemy, which, as she noted, is “a jealous mistress, she demands from pupils no less than life.” Strength, patience, courage, purity of spirit, and total dedication are the qualities required to “bring down the light of the shining ones. . . . This is the work of the Alchemist . . . to remain manifested as a living link between the supernal and terrestrial natures.”⁵¹

When magicians were taught, then, to “Believe thyself to be in a place, and thou art there,” the meaning ascribed to the significant terms *believe*, *thyself*, and *there* was closely circumscribed. The “thyself” of the alchemist and Adept was not the self of common experience or parlance. And although the entire panoply of phenomena associated with otherworldly realms was at one level recognized to be a subjective emanation, it was equally conceived as part of a hidden reality existing beyond but also in relationship with the inner world of the initiated self. Indeed, some sophisticated Golden Dawn Adepts regarded Astral Travel as a kind of experiential metaphor. Rather than worrying about the precise location (inner/outer) or status (subjective/objective, real/unreal) of the Astral Light, however, Golden Dawn magicians assumed an “occult” correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm and concerned themselves with an array of procedural devices intended to test the authenticity of occult experience. But if Golden Dawn magicians tended to emphasize the importance of travel in the Astral Light, Theosophists considered occult reality ever present in temporal existence. They argued that the uninitiated invariably fail to recognize the otherworldly in our midst, and unwittingly write it off as a mere figment of the imagination.

According to Annie Besant, it is the lack of full self-consciousness—or of what she calls “self-realisation”—on and of planes other than the physical or earthly that inhibits recognition of particular occult phenomena. The “normal, average man” mistakenly assumes that such phenomena, experienced by initiated and uninitiated alike as occurring within individual consciousness, originate in “his” imagination and are therefore “unreal.” For Besant, occultism’s greatest gift is that it teaches “normal, average man” how to negotiate the many levels of conscious awareness and recognize the reality of an exteriorized occult world. What all occultists held in common, however, was the conviction that their experience of the “phenomena of consciousness occurring on super-physical planes” speaks to more than the power of mutually reinforcing fantasy or the exquisite inventiveness of the personal self.⁵²

Florence Farr’s “consciousness of Being,” the alchemical “white tinc-

ture,” therefore involved not only an “occult” awareness of the full dimensions of the self but also its relationship with and place in the wider order of creation. As she said, the Adept sought to operate at both the “supernal” and “terrestrial” level. Similarly, like other advanced occultists, Farr conceived of the highest manifestation of an occult development of self as “a state of consciousness in which all our powers become supernatural.”⁵³ In an apparent reversal of that formulation, but one which amounts to the same thing, Annie Besant stated: “Whatever forces may be latent in the Universe at large or in man in particular, they are wholly natural. . . . This repudiation of the supernatural lies at the very threshold of Theosophy: the supersensuous, the superhuman, Yes; the supernatural, No.”⁵⁴ Initiates of the Golden Dawn echoed Besant’s sentiments when they agreed that “[s]upernormal events may be, but nothing is supernatural”; as Farr expressed it, “Magic power only implies a power not limited by common experience.”⁵⁵ It was the “supernormal” and “superhuman” to which advanced occultists aspired at the turn of the century, and the cultivation of imagination, the honing of the will, and the successive refinement of a particular understanding of self were the means by which that might be achieved. Occultists, of course, conceived of the initiated “superhuman” “spiritual man” within a framework of esotericism, but the kind of esotericism privileged at the fin de siècle was specific and contemporary in tone. As some occultists recognized, a sympathetic resonance existed between an occult articulation of spiritual evolution and “self-realization” and other highly influential contemporary ideas. In particular, occult metaphysics, theorization of self, and pursuit of an experience of “Being” that outstripped conventional notions of individual consciousness were intimately related to the kinds of issues and aspirations that found expression elsewhere at the fin de siècle.

The women and men who moved in the circles epitomized by A. R. Orage’s periodical *New Age* exemplified the close connection that existed between proponents of the “esoteric philosophy” and those interested in the ideas of the avant garde. Orage, a Theosophist and friend of Holbrook Jackson’s, had an acute sense of what was important as well as new in fin-de-siècle arts and letters. Those whose work he supported and commissioned often stood at the cutting edge of innovative European ideas, thereby making his periodical one of the cultural touchstones of the early twentieth century. Those who wrote for the *New Age* were certainly not all occultists, but together with their work, they represented the close interplay of the occult with seemingly secular preoccupations. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the Nietzschean and Bergsonian vogue at the turn of the century.

The *New Age* championed the work of both Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson, and Orage saw their ideas as crucial to an enlightened understanding of the “consciousness of Being.” In particular, and in common at certain points with Yeats, he regarded Nietzsche as an inspired mystic. Early translations of significant works by Nietzsche, some influential articles, and the appearance in 1898 of *The Eagle and the Serpent*, a short-lived periodical dedicated to an “egoistic philosophy,” had helped to introduce a small British readership to central Nietzschean preoccupations. Orage’s enthusiasm for Nietzsche was encouraged by Holbrook Jackson, who in 1900 lent him his own copy of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in its first English translation.⁵⁶ Orage went on to incorporate a Nietzschean perspective in the statement of aims for the *New Age*, declaring that the journal would do all it could to cooperate with “the darling object and purpose of the universal will of life [which] is the creation of a race of supremely and progressively intelligent beings.”⁵⁷

Leading influential occultists were similarly quick to claim a kinship with a Nietzschean “egoistic philosophy.” Nietzsche’s vision of an elite and highly evolved “superman,” his insistence on the sovereignty of the self as creator and arbiter of all “truths,” and emphasis on the all-powerful will spoke with great immediacy to occult endeavors. Annie Besant saw the Nietzschean superman as directly related to the “superhuman” occultist and a Theosophical understanding of spiritual development, while other Theosophists believed that Nietzsche’s realization found its antecedent in Mejnour, the “superman” of Bulwer Lytton’s novel *Zanoni*.⁵⁸ Orage, echoing Florence Farr in a slightly different context, considered the superman “no more than an intensified man, man made ecstatic.”⁵⁹ He was preoccupied with the same issue that absorbed Farr and others, the “alchemical” bridging of the “supernal” and “terrestrial” spheres that represented the goal of advanced occultism. Orage believed that a new “race” of initiated “supermen,” each of them in touch with the “concealed Magician” within, were capable of transcending the limitations of human consciousness. He saw this as a process of what he called “interiorization,” whereby the perfected intellect in combination with the development of the “ecstatic faculties” endows a heightened consciousness in which subject and object become one and “form merely another octave of the phenomenal world.” Thus, as Orage put it, a “superman” consciousness will “externalise” “our subjectivity,” allowing that same mutuality or simultaneity of inner and outer that was so familiar to the elite Adepts of Florence Farr’s “Sphere” group. The new “race of supremely and progressively intelligent beings” would be limited only “by the limits of the imaginative faculties of our mind.”⁶⁰

For A. R. Orage, the occult superman is defined by a transformed and spiritualized consciousness that transcends the limitations of mental powers as we know them and signifies the ultimate fulfillment of what it means to be human. This was the connection that most interested occultists made with Nietzsche, Isabelle de Steiger claiming that he had correctly perceived “that *the new race of mankind must be a supernormal one*.”⁶¹ A few remained unconvinced. For example, Ralph Shirley, editor of the *Occult Review*, felt that the spiritually unevolved Nietzschean superman “would not be the sort of person one would care to encounter alone on a dark night.”⁶² In general, though, occultists like Orage, Annie Besant, and Florence Farr embraced an aristocratic Nietzschean view of an elite new “race” of beings, seeing in it no hint of contradiction with a socialist vision of an elevated new order predicated on cultural and spiritual refinement. This was the type of ethical socialism espoused by the Fellowship of the New Life and, subsequently, by some members of the Fabian Arts Group. Both groups had their Nietzschean sympathizers. Indeed, Orage was a member of the Fabian Arts Group, and the *New Age* was dedicated in part to the promotion of its ideas. Florence Farr, who was recruited on the recommendation of George Bernard Shaw to write for the journal, was equally firm in her commitments, and made an explicit connection between Nietzsche and socialism in her review of Orage’s book on “superman consciousness.”⁶³

Similarly, Farr and Orage undoubtedly saw eugenics as paralleling occultism’s emphasis on the development of a “race” exemplified by the self-realized Adept. Occultists were often interested in the views propounded by the Eugenic Education Society, and discussed eugenics in terms of preparing “a proper receptacle for the soul.”⁶⁴ Isabelle de Steiger explicitly observed that the “Eugenics Society is perhaps one of the great coming factors in the regeneration of man, cleansing as it does the *outside* of the cup and platter.” She was not alone among occultists in thinking that eugenics complemented Rosicrucian Hermeticism, with its emphasis on “Regenerate Humanity.”⁶⁵ Farr had been taught in the Golden Dawn that “[i]t must be our object then, to become that Perfect Man,” and clearly associated this in turn with the idea that “one of our aims should be the Regeneration of the Race of the Planet.”⁶⁶ In a similar vein, de Steiger commented that the “Hermetic Doctrine . . . can be best translated by the word Regeneration.”⁶⁷ The tremendous emphasis on the regenerative potential of occultism at the turn of the century operated as an implicit counterpoint to pessimistic characterizations of fin-de-siècle culture, including Max Nordau’s damning assessment of its “mysticism,” and Farr and other Golden Dawn magicians worked intensively together in the Second Order towards

the “Regeneration of the Race.”⁶⁸ The reactionary and racist implications of this and allied ideals went unacknowledged and were possibly not recognized by either Farr or Orage, who were not uncommon among either occultists or early twentieth-century eugenicists in holding politically progressive views. But occultism, perhaps most markedly in the Theosophical elaboration of hierarchical “races,” was potentially threatening to a leveling and democratic vision. The protofascism inherent in certain strands of occult thought was later to become more developed, but at the dawn of the new century the elaboration of this line of thinking lay in the future.⁶⁹

If Nietzsche was claimed by occultists as a fellow traveler, it was Henri Bergson who came closest to articulating an “occult” philosophy. Bergson, the son of a Polish Jewish father and English Jewish mother, was educated at the Ecole Normale and in 1900 was awarded a chair at the prestigious Collège de France. He was already a celebrated if controversial thinker and writer when, in 1907, he achieved widespread international fame with the publication of *L'Évolution Créatrice*. This was the book that introduced a wide reading public to his philosophy of creativity and evolution and established the influence of Bergsonian vitalism in Britain and the United States. Bergson's ideas gained ground in Britain towards the end of the first decade of the new century, and over two hundred articles about him appeared in the British press between 1909 and 1911.⁷⁰ A. R. Orage's *New Age* was as active in promoting Bergson as it was Nietzsche, and it published T. E. Hulme's seminal introductory articles about the philosopher. Hulme, whom Holbrook Jackson greatly respected, was an admirer of Bergson and in 1913 issued a translation of the latter's *Introduction to Metaphysics*.⁷¹

Hulme was well acquainted with occultists, but there was a different and deeply personal link between Bergson and British magic. Henri Bergson was the brother of Moina (born Mina Bergson) MacGregor Mathers—the wife of the head of the Golden Dawn and the Order's chief inspiration. Certainly W. B. Yeats met Henri Bergson in 1894, when he visited the Matherses in Paris, and was aware that MacGregor Mathers was irritated by his inability to impress his brother-in-law with his magic.⁷² There is no indication that Bergson showed any interest in magic, but he was nonetheless involved with psychical research and deeply concerned with matters relating to spirit and consciousness. He espoused a critical vitalist philosophy with roots in a long and venerable European history of which the Renaissance Hermetic tradition is part, and links to both German *Naturphilosophie* and Nietzschean ideas.⁷³ Bergson's notion of an *élan vital*, a vital force or impulse that permeates the universe and everything in it, bore a distinct relationship to animistic occultism, but it was not solely his neovitalism that resonated with an occult

perspective. Bergson's concern with the mystery of existence, engagement with the phenomena of consciousness, assertion that the "intellect is characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life" and consequent valorization of intuition had clear implications for early twentieth-century occultism.⁷⁴

Bergson argued for the importance, intensity, and reality of inner experience, and proposed the interrelationship not only of inner and outer realities but also of body and spirit. In a striking parallel with occult thought, he argued that matter and spirit are not opposites but part of a whole. Furthermore, he conceived of the origins of matter, and of life itself, as an effect of "supra-consciousness." The primacy he accorded consciousness, and by implication the suggestion that the real is an effect of consciousness, was enormously appealing to occultists for whom access to alternative realities was bound up with changes in consciousness. Equally, his views had immediate relevance for all those who accepted the notion of an evolving spiritual Self with an existence that defies the limitations of temporality, and in a wider permutation could be taken as confirmation of the movement between individual and "cosmic" consciousness to which Theosophists and magicians referred. Perhaps most important, Bergson valorized intuition over what he maintained were the rationalizing and therefore necessarily limiting strategies of the intellect. He argued that intellect has been developed at the expense of intuition and that each has come to "represent two opposite directions of the work of consciousness." According to Bergson, intellect or intelligence is unable to conceptualize anything that operates outside the existing framework of natural law and thus cannot truly apprehend a phenomenal world invested and animated with spirit. In other words, the intellect, and indeed "modern philosophy [which] has its point of departure in the great astronomical and physical discoveries of modern times," is incapable of penetrating the deepest mysteries of life. It is only consciousness in its fullest sense, Bergson argued, a consciousness characterized by the development of the intuitive faculties and allied to the wellsprings of creativity, that can truly encounter the essence of all things and apprehend reality itself.⁷⁵

This clearly accorded with a broad spectrum of occult opinion. Evelyn Underhill, who attended Bergson's enthusiastically received London lectures of 1913 in the wake of her own success with *Mysticism*, reported that she was "drunk with Bergson." She was particularly struck by the similarity between Bergson's "conclusions on the nature of spirit" and a mystical understanding of Christian doctrine, but Bergson's message also bore a distinct similarity to some of Madame Blavatsky's more straightforwardly mystical

pronouncements.⁷⁶ She had asserted, for example, that “the infinite cannot be known by the finite,” and emphasized that “superhuman knowledge” of “the divine essence could be communicated to the higher spiritual Self in a state of ecstasy.”⁷⁷ This did not accord with a strictly magical perspective, which eschewed ecstatic illumination in favor of a highly controlled encounter with the divine; but Bergson’s emphasis on intellect illuminated by intuition as the means of “knowing” reality was similar in tone and substance to an acknowledgment of the role of the consciously controlled and developed imagination in magical practice. A. R. Orage, treading a fine line between these positions when writing on “superman” consciousness in the same year as the publication of Bergson’s *L’Evolution Créatrice*, argued that “the ecstatic state of reasoning is imagination, which is a swift-winged process of deduction and induction.”⁷⁸ And Bergson, like the occultists, reinterpreted a conventional understanding of precisely what constitutes reason and knowledge. Edward Maitland and Anna Kingsford anticipated Bergson when they argued in the 1880s that “Reason” must be understood in its complete sense, and not taken to be merely “the mutilated faculty which ordinarily passes for such, for that represents the intellect without the intuition.” Similarly, Bergson insisted that it is necessary to “superpose on scientific truth a knowledge of another kind, which may be called metaphysical,” and asserted that it is this “heightened” knowledge which gives access to “reality itself, in the profoundest meaning of the word.” Bergson thus effectively displaced the analytical power of the intellect, and with it science (“a philosophy of intuition will be a negation of science”), as the best means of understanding “Life as a whole.”⁷⁹

Bergson’s philosophy spoke to an esoteric understanding of a reality beyond the purview of “modern science,” and complemented occultists’ long-held assertions that scientific materialism was incapable of penetrating the deepest secrets of the universe. William James, a great admirer of Bergson, expressed a similar sentiment when he gave his presidential address to the Society for Psychical Research in 1896. On that occasion he acknowledged that “[o]ur debt to Science is literally boundless,” but equally maintained that “[s]cience taken in its essence should stand only for a method.” He suggested that “[s]cience has come to be identified with a certain fixed general belief, the belief that the deeper order of Nature is mechanical exclusively, and that non-mechanical categories are irrational ways of conceiving and explaining even such a thing as human life.”⁸⁰ James was propelled to international—in his case, European—fame after the turn of the century with the publication in 1902 of *Varieties of Religious Experience*. This was followed in 1907 (the year of Bergson’s *L’Evolution Créatrice*) by James’s *Pragmatism*. Like

Bergson, James placed great emphasis on what he called the “facts of experience” in comprehending “the deeper order of Nature.” Both men were concerned with redefining our understanding of reality, and both in different ways held to the view that reality is revealed within what Bergson called in the 1889 essay of that name “the immediate data of consciousness.” James credited Bergson’s elaboration of the concept and role of consciousness as key elements in the development of his own ideas. While friends like the Swiss psychologist Théodore Flournoy felt conversely that “Bergsonian theory . . . is only a plagiarism of your *Stream of Consciousness*,” James himself considered Bergson’s influence decisive in his own abandonment of intellectual logic as the means by which to finally “know” reality.⁸¹

The thinking of Bergson and James on questions of “the real” was by no means identical, but James acknowledged that reality as he understood it “exceeds our logic, overflows and surrounds it.” “I prefer,” he said, “to call reality if not irrational then at least non-rational in its constitution.” And, as he put it in *A Pluralistic Universe*, to suggest this was ultimately to argue for the adoption of “some higher (or lower) form of rationality.”⁸² Both men conceived of reality as forever exceeding the structural processes of intellectual logic and the conceptual possibilities of the rationalizing mind. Similarly, both subscribed to the view that a different “form of rationality” is required if we are to become “theoretically acquainted with the essential nature of reality.”⁸³ But James as a philosophically inclined psychologist was primarily concerned with temporal reality as it related to an understanding of the workings of human consciousness. He hypothesized that what he called the stream of consciousness, the “pure” experiential flux that he believed preexisted any rationalizing process, might be regarded as a model for understanding “the essential nature of reality.”⁸⁴ Although his conclusions edged towards the idea that subjective consciousness was a microcosm of the macrocosmic “real,” James stopped short of explicating an equivalent to the kind of experiential knowledge to which Bergson subscribed. Bergson, the psychologically inclined philosopher, promoted a metaphysics that proceeded not from a model of human consciousness and the notion of experiential flux but the idea of a universe animated by the *élan vital*. He postulated a reality that could be “known” only in flashes of experiential inspiration by the developed intuitive faculties, and sought to elaborate a philosophical method that would act as a corrective to the limitations of an analytical approach.

Although most magicians aspired to far more than a mere flash of experiential knowledge of “the real,” some of Bergson’s ideas resonated with Cabalistic and other occult notions of the crucial conjunction of words and

images in creating a timeless moment of spiritual illumination. These notions, in turn, were echoed around the end of the century in a literary “decadence” that featured Symbolist sensibilities. As Holbrook Jackson recognized, the literary “decadence” of the 1890s was intimately related to “spiritual desire” and the rise of “mysticism,” as well as to notions of an aestheticized self constituted through direct sensorial apprehension of the world. British “decadence” was heavily influenced by a genre of French writing that emerged with Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire and continued through Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, and J.-K. Huysmans; here Symbolist ideas were interwoven with concepts that were to become so central to British occultism. Huysmans was involved with French occultism, as, of course, was the novelist Joséphin Péladan, and their two novels—respectively *A Rebours* (Against the grain) and *Le Vice Suprême* (The supreme vice)—were published in the same year.⁸⁵ Huysmans’s infamous “satanic” novel, *Là-Bas* (Down there), was the more overtly occult, but the “decadent” appreciation of the self of the senses that featured in *A Rebours* was widely influential. It was evident in Oscar Wilde’s writing and subsequently appeared in reworked form in the novels of Marcel Proust. Proust was also influenced by Bergson, whose Sorbonne lectures he had attended in the early 1890s.⁸⁶ It is clear, though, that Bergson was merely one influential factor in the rich interaction of philosophical, poetic, and artistic ideas during this period. Bergsonian vitalism, an engagement with a “decadent” self of the senses that confounds mundane rationality, and a commitment to subjective idealism best exemplified by a Nietzschean “egoistic philosophy” were ideas being explored in a variety of venues—not least in a British occultism that owed much to the avant-garde exponents of the European belle époque.

T. E. Hulme, Bergson’s translator, was himself emblematic of the symbiotic relationship among vitalism, occultism, and advanced literary ideas in Britain; and his small discussion group, which met during 1909 to discuss “a new ‘dry and hard’ poetic,” constituted a forerunner of the Imagist movement.⁸⁷ Hulme was attracted to Bergson’s antipositivist vitalism, and borrowed from Bergson’s metaphysics to conceptualize his own theory of poetry as “intuited truth.”⁸⁸ Hulme’s concern with the poetic image as a nondiscursive representation of intuited reality owed a great deal to French Symbolism, and Symbolism was itself caught up in an occult worldview, which suggests that a symbol can act as the gateway to the apprehension of a reality that eludes everyday consciousness. This does not mean that a symbol can be reduced to a single meaning, but rather that certain powerful symbols can facilitate “knowledge” or an experience that would otherwise

escape us. Both W. B. Yeats and Florence Farr were deeply invested in the theory and practice of occult symbolism, and Farr herself taught that “thoughts which are above human consciousness clothe themselves with symbolism and present things to our imagination, which cannot be told in words.”⁸⁹ At some point Yeats commented to Ralph Shirley “that in his investigations into matters occult the two facts for which he met with the greatest weight of evidence were symbolism and astrology.”⁹⁰ Arthur Symons’s important book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* was dedicated to W. B. Yeats, and recognized the relationship between what Symons called mysticism and major Symbolist assumptions about the power of the poetic image.⁹¹ Yeats as both poet and prominent Golden Dawn magician became a major source of the transmission of Symbolist and occult ideas to other seminal twentieth-century poets.⁹² But the connections were already being made in terms of personnel. W. B. Yeats, the poet Ezra Pound, T. E. Hulme, and Florence Farr were moving in the same avant-garde literary circles in 1909, and Farr was to inspire Pound’s “Portrait d’une Femme.” Thus a Bergsonian valorization of the highly charged intuitive “flash” that short-circuits rational comprehension, French Symbolism, literary “decadence,” and the poetics of Yeats and others not only had demonstrable links with the occult but were similarly part of the rich cultural repertoire within which occultism was defining itself at the dawn of the new century.⁹³

The trends that were so much a part of the fin-de-siècle cultural milieu found ultimate expression in a profound commitment to a solipsistic self-realization that exceeds the limited conceptual domain of language. This is the impetus behind Bergson’s metaphysics as much as it represents the “consciousness of Being” of fin-de-siècle occultism. The claims and preoccupations of occultism, however, seem far removed from the concerns of the innovative late nineteenth-century practitioners of the sciences of mind. And yet at the end of the nineteenth century medical psychology had not entirely shaken itself free of a traditional association between philosophical inquiry and issues of the self, or of the equally traditional metaphysical implications of that inquiry. Furthermore, there was more to the relationship between occultism and the new medical psychology than a neo-Romantic concern with the personal depths of the multivalent self. Although the innovative medical psychologists of the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s were dedicated to severing the connections between metaphysics and psychology, the philosophical (and occult) affiliations of the discipline remained close to the surface. Annie Besant, of course, was keenly interested in medical psychology; but on the other side of the equation someone like Pierre Janet, whose work she followed so closely, had revealing affiliations of his own. Janet’s first love

had been philosophy, and he had excelled in the subject at the elite *Ecole Normale Supérieure* in Paris where he was placed second in his class. Just one year ahead of him was the young Henri Bergson, and the two men remained close friends and associates throughout their lives.

Janet began his career as a teacher of philosophy, but he became interested in hypnotism while searching for a thesis topic for the *doctorat ès-lettres*. In the mid-1880s he started to conduct experiments with Léonie, the hypnotic subject whose name became famous through his work, and quickly verified all that he had been told of her. During the course of his experiments he discovered what magicians have traditionally claimed—that it is possible to hypnotize a subject from a distance. Moreover, when he found out that Léonie had been mesmerized in the past, Janet examined the literature on mesmerism and realized that hypnotism merely replicated many of the effects of the older practice. Meanwhile, his early published work in the mid-1880s brought interested observers to his door, among them Frederic Myers and Henry Sidgwick of the Society for Psychical Research. The major results of Janet's investigations were incorporated into his thesis, *L'Automatisme Psychologique*, but the *doctorat ès-lettres* also required a minor thesis written in Latin. In a move that can have been neither accidental nor purely idiosyncratic, Janet chose to write on Bacon and the alchemists.⁹⁴ The links between contemporary hypnotism and magical practice might have been lost on Janet, but the alchemical tradition presumably spoke in some way to his interest in hypnotism, altered mental states, and dual consciousness. These were also, of course, areas that interested the Society for Psychical Research, and Janet himself became one of the society's corresponding members. The SPR was responsible for much of the investigation of hypnotism in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, and one of its members, Dr. C. Lloyd Tuckey (who, it will be recalled, was briefly a member of the Golden Dawn), visited Dr. Ambroise Liébeault in Nancy in 1888 in order to observe his work with hypnotism. It would not have escaped Janet's notice that it was two influential members of the Society for Psychical Research, Tuckey and Dr. John Milne Bramwell, who were at the forefront of promoting the efficacy of therapeutic hypnotism in Britain.⁹⁵

Thus Pierre Janet, whose work on multiple personality was highly influential at the turn of the century, first pursued his interest in altered states of consciousness such as hysteria and somnambulism through philosophical inquiry. He subsequently began his medical studies and from there moved to the Salpêtrière before assuming (with Bergson's strong support) a permanent position at the Collège de France in 1902. Janet's friendship with Bergson and association with William James spoke to the continued shared

preoccupations of psychology and philosophy during this period, and these interests were also clearly represented within the Society for Psychical Research. But although all three men were associated with the society, and both William James and Henri Bergson served terms as its prewar presidents, the medically trained psychologists were primarily interested in a “scientific” scrutiny of particular occult phenomena as possible clues to the workings of the mind.

Indeed, although psychical research was in part directed against Victorian scientism and “the cult of positivism,” most active psychical researchers favored the interpretive framework of scientific naturalism and adhered to the empirical method as the only legitimate means by which to proceed in their investigations. For all their sympathy with a nonreductionist account of mental processes, and however close psychology might have been to the occult in its concerns, psychologists and psychical researchers parted company with occultism when it came to epistemology and method. This is also where Bergson, with his “philosophy of intuition,” differed from even those most “advanced psychologists” like Janet, to whom Annie Besant referred in 1904. Although occultists often used the term *psychology* when referring to their own activities and rationales, and felt that they were making a bona fide contribution to the natural and human sciences in their subjective explorations of consciousness, the reappraisal of the role of intellect and understanding of the term *knowledge* that occult practice implied did not accord with the perceptive of the “scientific” disciplines.

Equally, while medical psychology and occultism might be different expressions of a fin-de-siècle inquiry into the constitution and meaning of consciousness, the practitioners of the new sciences of mind understood the necessity of eradicating any trace of occult philosophy from their work. The struggle for scientific validation and recognition in the field of medical psychology was in part bound up with the effort to rid psychology of any taint of the occult arts. This was doubly imperative because not only were medical psychologists interested in (and therefore involved with) the phenomena of occultism, be it changed states of consciousness or manifestations of “supernormal” thought transference, they were also acutely aware of the mesmeric and occult precursors of their own medical specialty and its applied techniques. And, indeed, for all the caution, the boundaries were difficult to police. It is quite possible, for example, that nobody knew quite who they were dealing with when Stanislas de Guaita participated in the experiments on thought transference carried out by Liébeault and others in Nancy in 1886, as reported by British psychical researchers that same year.⁹⁶ It was therefore crucial for medical psychologists to distance themselves in every

way possible from the contaminations of the occult with which, almost by definition, they were so closely associated. This was perhaps particularly true of psychoanalysis. Freud recognized all too well the occult connotations of his interpretive work on dreams and, indeed, of much of the phenomena of consciousness that interested him. His simultaneous fascination with the occult and vigorous attempts to distance himself from it are matters of record. Freud feared that the occult, which he referred to in 1910 as “the black tide of mud,” would compromise the respectability of psychoanalysis. But his early immersion in *Naturphilosophie*, friendship with men such as Wilhelm Fleiss, investigations of mediumistic phenomena with Sandor Ferenczi, legendary superstitious anxieties, mixed response to the occult interests of some of his followers, and great rift with Carl Jung over just such matters suggest in briefest outline the parameters of the tensions inherent in Freud’s position.⁹⁷

It was Jung, in fact, interested in psychical research from the outset, who went on to explore the relevance of Eastern, mystical, and occult teachings as potential keys to a more spiritualized “self-realization” (or, in his own terms, “individuation”) than was possible within Freudian psychoanalytic theory. After his break with Freud, Jung immersed himself in a study of Gnosticism and Hermeticism that owed a great deal to the work of the Theosophist G. R. S. Mead.⁹⁸ Jung was also familiar with the ideas of Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland, and his evolving theories of the unconscious as they developed after 1912 were indebted to key occult insights. His deep interest during the interwar years in Renaissance Hermetic literature led him to propose a psychologized reading of alchemy similar to that espoused by occultists at the fin de siècle. Indeed, Jung, who cited A. E. Waite’s translation of the *Musaeum Hermeticum* in his own *Psychology and Alchemy*, thought of alchemy as “the historical counterpart of my psychology of the unconscious.”⁹⁹ But if Jung’s theorizing of unconscious processes has a distinct bearing on occult notions of self-realization and was taken up later in the century by occultists, there were also prewar occultists who recognized a certain kinship in Freudian ideas. By 1910 certain advanced occultists had become interested in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, and indeed claimed that occultism anticipated the insights of psychoanalysis. Given Freud’s attempts to distance psychoanalysis from charges of occultism, this is something of an irony. In a further ironic twist, critics have suggested that the psychoanalyst is a modern sorcerer and psychoanalysis itself a magical art form. This is the kind of accusation that Freud wished to avoid, but occultists themselves found it perfectly possible to accept that certain occult experiences rely upon an intimate relationship with the personal unconscious

while refusing the notion that occult reality is simply a subjective unconscious effect. Indeed, occultists who were sympathetic to psychoanalytic insights remained unshaken in their belief in the efficacy of practical magic and a verifiable occult reality.

For while Jung acknowledged his debt to Renaissance magic; some pre-war occultists embraced psychoanalytic theory; and fin-de-siècle occultism itself remained deeply implicated in the contemporary innovative elaboration of subjectivity, there were significant differences between the occult and allied enterprises. Occultism was conceived in quite different terms and dedicated to different ends. Late-Victorian magicians were undertaking what we might think of as remarkable and sustained explorations of the psyche, and extraordinary experimentation with the powers of the human mind, but they were absorbed in the magical enterprise and expressed the endeavor in these terms. Adepts were aware that at its most sophisticated, advanced magical practice exposed the limited nature of the personal “I” of conscious identity, but were concerned less with probing the limits of subjectivity than with exploring and establishing the reality of occult realms. The seeming parallels with the psychoanalytic project are startling. But although Magical Orders were teaching Adepts how to develop a magical self that could conduct lengthy forays into real but hidden worlds that interpenetrate our own, occultists spoke not of psyche but of planes; and in practical terms, of Astral Travel rather than investigations of the repressed components of the unconscious. Additionally, magical practice relied upon the development of multiple selves, which did not constitute a problematic splitting of the “I,” or represent a crisis of personal identity. It taught *willed* access to the Astral Light, and emphasized mutuality of experience and the ability to take control and “change” certain facets of astral existence. This, then, represented a developed and controlled engagement with personal consciousness that was quite distinct from the kinds of mental states investigated and pathologized by late-Victorian medical psychology and Freudian psychoanalysis; distinct even from the hermeneutic processes of “individuation” favored by Jungian analytical psychology. Magical practice was an undertaking that operated on a different scale and in a different register.

Fin-de-siècle occultism was like a shadow play of synchronicity. It mirrored broader cultural trends and preoccupations but in key respects magnified and outstripped them. The occult remained, though, a child of the historical moment. It drew upon the Renaissance admonition to “Know Thyself” and reconfigured that understanding of the knowing self in the most modern sense. The occult recognized not one self but a series of selves, which quite literally in themselves constituted incontrovertible evidence that

consciousness in all its dimensions can be known, and that the initiated self can penetrate the heart of the mysteries of "Being." In this, for all the acknowledgments of the multiplicities and occlusions of consciousness, and occultism's apparent attention to a decentralized subjectivity, the individual rational subject remained firmly rooted at the heart of the enterprise. At any given moment there was a lucid defining and controlling self. The optimism that characterized occultists' faith in the ability of such a self to plumb the great mysteries of the universe as represented by human consciousness only echoed the sureties of Freud and others at the turn of the century who similarly argued that the rational mind can come to know its own most precious and dreadful "irrational." Like the new practitioners of the sciences of mind, advanced occultists would have derided any suggestion that the theory or practice of occultism was predicated on an optimistic, overweening (even irrational) assumption. They were confident that they were pursuing a rational if unconventional experiential route to absolute clarity of mind. As Florence Farr commented in the preface to her 1912 novel, "To me the work of making the mind clear by first-hand experience is the holy alchemy of life."¹⁰⁰

This "work of making the mind clear" was pursued through careful preparation and development of what occultists took to be the limitless potential of personal consciousness as realized in the full elaboration of the self. Advanced occultism addressed in its own unique way the contemporary exploration of the limits of the rational self while predicating self-realization on the notion of a boundless but acutely self-aware "I" with ultimate referral to a stable and controlling consciousness. Occultism defined consciousness in a way that might not have been amenable to scientific criteria, or provable in any positivist sense, but was nevertheless conceived as infused with rationality even as it postulated a self that could traverse the dichotomized fault lines established by the rationalizing intellect. After all, the rationalizing intellect was not jettisoned during occult voyages of discovery; it was actively at work. Occult "strategies of inwardness" were still strategies, designed to shift the sense of self beyond the limits imposed by everyday "waking consciousness" and towards a full "consciousness of Being." This was a self that transcended in graphic terms those conceptual dualisms of subject/object and inner/outer that had recently come under attack from the secular disciplines, and at the same time epitomized that faith in rationality upon which those disciplines depended. Most crucially, however, an occult metaphysics of self represents an unorthodox but identifiably modern attempt to bring consciousness to a particular "understanding of itself."¹⁰¹

In the name of the unraveling of the mystery of “Being,” the occult generated a language of selfhood that implicitly countered the modern association of spirituality with irrationality while pursuing a spiritualized formulation of a modern secularized understanding of the complexity of human consciousness and the significance of the irrational domain. In so doing it sought to negotiate that seemingly oppositional relationship between the spiritual and secular and the “rational” and “irrational,” proposing a language of self that sustained the alchemical ideal of holistic perfection in its constitution of an ultimate knowing “occult” subject. The expressive rationality of the modern occult self promised more than a Bergsonian momentary flash of spiritualized inspiration, but it equally represented that symbiosis of intellect and intuition characterizing the Bergsonian “deeper” self (*le moi profond*) and the appeal of the seemingly nondiscursive Symbolist event. And yet this interiorized language of self also articulated some of the tensions intrinsic to modern subjectivity. In particular, it was representative of a modern sensibility that remained immured in and fascinated by the performance of the irrational even as it sought to measure, understand, and to some extent control or manipulate it. Bergson and the occultists conceived of a finessed and ultimately unified self-consciousness that stood in stark contrast with the fragmented psyche postulated by Freud, but both positions assumed the power and importance of the occluded realms of personal consciousness for the rational self-referential “I.” The heritage of a Bergsonian philosophy of life was played out through quite distinct political movements and European perspectives on modernity as the new century got under way, but the simultaneous necessity for and frailty of a modern rapprochement with the unconscious remained a preoccupation.¹⁰² Freud’s subsequent analysis of the cost of “civilization,” the often devastating eruption of all that must be repressed in the name of rationality, order, and respectability, comes close, as Marshall Berman suggests, to “a definitive vision of the inner contradictions and ultimate fragility of modern life.”¹⁰³

Not least of these inner contradictions at the turn of the century was the tension between the spiritual and secular that mirrored and was so often articulated through anxieties about “the irrational.” A distinctively modern Weberian disenchantment and converse aspiration to some kind of spiritual dimension to life emerged during this period as constitutive of a new dialectic of modernity. An oppositional contingent and transcendent self formulated through competing accounts of subjectivity operated at the heart of this dialectic. Indeed, that same dialectic could be intrinsic to both secularized and spiritualized accounts of the self. For while many of “the moderns” eschewed a belief in external supernatural forces, they also turned elsewhere

for answers to the age-old conundrums of existence. It was this negotiation of the spiritual and secular that epitomized the self-realization of which Holbrook Jackson spoke, and that characterized the occult exploration of new and in key respects secularized routes to numinous experience. The occult conceived of divinity as bound up in complex ways with the self just as occult practice sought direct experience of both divinity and a spiritualized "real" through a unique understanding and exploration of subjective consciousness. Occultists repudiated the notion of a transcendent godhead existing beyond the forces of nature, preferring instead the formulation of the supernatural as "a state of consciousness." In proposing the immanence of the self-referential subject, the occult articulated a unique expression of both the modern drive for "self-realization" and a contemporary impulse towards spirituality. Ultimately, occultists sought in the infinite realms of human consciousness an alternative source and repository of self-understanding and spiritual purpose. In effect, and in a distinctively modern strategic move, the occult taught modern men and women how to create new spiritualized meanings "out of the resources of the self."¹⁰⁴ As Florence Farr expressed it: "I stood naked in a bleak and dark eternity and filled it with my exultation."¹⁰⁵ This was the modern enchanted self.

CHAPTER FIVE

✧ Occult Reality and the Fictionalizing Mind ✧

According to its own rationale, occultism's concern with consciousness and its role as the "new" supernatural were not synonymous with a relativist retreat to the self. Occultists did not consider their activities as representing merely a withdrawal into a personal inner world, or that their experiences signified only subjective truths. The occult taught that self-consciousness was the route to an objective reality, albeit a reality that could be accessed and known only through the offices of the prepared and disciplined mind. In magical practice, direct apprehension of an occluded real was conceived in terms of the construction of a magical personality, which sought to navigate occult realms and map the interrelationship of macrocosm and microcosm. More generally, an occult "consciousness of Being" involved an understanding of the complexities of the self and the potential of a perfectly realized personal consciousness to "know" the cosmic "Mind." Furthermore, occultism paid close attention to a mystical tradition that claimed the privileged medium of dream and vision as the path to illumination. This emphasis on the importance of subjective experience and personal revelation was central to fin-de-siècle occultism, and it shared in this respect a close affinity with the traditional mysticism with which it was so closely allied. Although occultism could be directed towards ends other than mystical union with the divine, both occultism and mysticism were predicated on the authenticity and broader relevance of the manifestations of interiority. In the case of occultism, however, individuals underwent a training in the apprehension and negotiation of occult phenomena, and subjective claims were tested and measured against clearly established criteria. It was understood that an experience that was so intimately bound up with the creative and little-understood potential of the human mind must be appropriately sought, verified, and accredited if it was to attain the status of the objectively real.

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was a major training ground for those who sought expertise in the techniques of practical magic, and because magic was conceived in psychologized terms, much of the work of initiates was directed towards raising the mundane conscious self to an altered or exalted higher level. A suitably altered or transfigured state of consciousness was considered a necessary preamble to any significant magical endeavor, and there were various ways of achieving this, notably meditative and visualization techniques and emotionally charged ritual incantation. Some aspects of magical practice called for sophisticated forms of controlled consciousness, and this was especially apparent in the various types of clairvoyance associated with astral work. The Golden Dawn offered initiates of its elite Second Order the opportunity to engage in the systematic exploration of occult or astral realms, and Adepts were taught three related techniques. These were “Skrying in the Spirit Vision,” which involved the use of a “shew-stone,” or symbol through which the scryer observed occult realms and phenomena; “Travelling in the Spirit Vision,” in which the magician entered and interacted with these nonphysical planes of existence; and “Rising in [or on] the Planes,” a complex process dedicated to highly spiritual ends which involved negotiating the ten Sephiroth, or way stations, on the Tree of Life. “Skrying,” “Travelling,” and “Rising” represented an ascending scale of magical expertise. “Skrying” was considered the most straightforward, although it was far from being a passive procedure and like all magical practice involved both control and interpretation. “Travelling” and “Rising,” however, called for an altogether more sophisticated negotiation of individual consciousness, but while they were different procedures with distinct purposes, magicians sometimes used the terms interchangeably.¹

These three types of astral clairvoyant work came to assume tremendous importance within the Golden Dawn. The major point of this kind of endeavor was to gain direct knowledge of nonhuman realms of existence, but it was also possible to use interaction with astral beings to explore, for example, aspects of past lives or to acquire the strength and support of powerful spiritual guardians. The Order’s understanding of the existence of occult planes of existence inhabited by powerful spiritual entities was partly based on the complex cosmological system devised by John Dee, the Elizabethan mathematician and magus, in collaboration with a medium. Familiarity with Dee’s cosmology and the Enochian system of magic he formulated provided the basis of much Second Order magical work. Dee’s insights helped to provide a conceptual framework within which all advanced magicians operated, although Aleister Crowley was possibly the only magician who attempted to replicate in full the exacting practical experiments that gave rise

to Dee's knowledge.² The Golden Dawn's Chief, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, was skilled in the use of the Enochian system and used it to call up occult forces, and one of the Order's Flying Rolls provides examples of visions obtained by several Adepts using Enochian magic.³ Surviving records indicate that a small group of Golden Dawn magicians practiced "Skrying in the Spirit Vision" in order to explore Dee's symbolism, and this group, which sometimes included Florence Farr, emulated Dee's method and used a clairvoyant medium. It is unlikely that the medium was an initiated member of the Golden Dawn, but the magicians themselves listened and interpreted as she described what she observed of astral domains conjured by the group using Dee's magical invocations.⁴

"Travelling in the Spirit Vision," sometimes called Astral Projection or, more simply, Astral Travel, involved magicians in an immediate and first-hand exploration of the Astral Light. The Astral Light referred to the kinds of occult realms described by John Dee and elaborated by Eliphas Lévi, and the Golden Dawn instructed its Adepts in the use of a rich variety of symbols, which facilitated access to these otherworldly planes of existence. Perhaps chief among these were the colored geometric symbols known as Tattwas (or Tattvas), which were used by Golden Dawn magicians to induce a self-hypnotic state in accordance with their understanding of Hindu practice.⁵ Individual Tattwas consist of a combination of two of the five elemental signs (earth, air, fire, spirit, and water) painted onto a square of cardboard. One Tattwa, for example, consists of a large red triangle (fire) with a small black or indigo egg (spirit) at its center. Each Tattwa provides entry to a specific part of the astral realms, and magicians were taught how to meditate deeply on a particular symbol in order to pass into the relevant sphere. They were instructed to gaze fixedly at the image "until you seem to see *into* it," or to place the symbol against the forehead "keeping the eyes closed." The aim was to obliterate all thoughts other than those related to the symbol and thus to pass "into a state of reverie; or with a distinct feeling of change, something allied in sensation to a faint, with a feeling urging you to resist, but if you are highly inspired, fear not, do not resist, let yourself go."⁶ By concentrating intensely on the Tattwa and performing the appropriate invoking ritual, a magician could transform the symbol into a great door in the form, say, of a flaming triangle of fire, which would provide entry to the desired astral region. Duly prepared, the magician's initiated consciousness, or "Sphere of Astral Light," would then travel in embodied form through the magic gateway and into the astral world.

These procedures were sometimes, and for certain individuals, supple-

mented by the use of drugs. It seems likely that particular drugs circulated unofficially within the Golden Dawn, and it is claimed that Aleister Crowley was introduced to consciousness-changing drugs by one of the Second Order's most accomplished magicians, Allan Bennett. Crowley certainly experimented with hashish about the turn of the century and found it a valuable aid to the kind of introspective mind control that was taught in the Golden Dawn.⁷ The Theosophical Society was warning against the long-term effects of Indian Hemp in the early 1890s, and W. B. Yeats experimented with both hashish and mescaline during that decade. Yeats and Maud Gonne took hashish together in Paris in 1894, and she discovered that it facilitated an out-of-body experience similar to the effects of the disciplined techniques associated with Astral Travel. Yeats recorded his experiences with hashish in his essay "Discoveries," and it is clear that both hashish and mescaline were part of an accepted if unsanctioned magical pharmacopoeia.⁸ The mescaline was supplied on one occasion in 1897 by Havelock Ellis, who noted that "while an excellent subject for visions, and very familiar with various vision-producing drugs and processes," Yeats "much prefers haschish" [sic].⁹ The fact, however, that some of the drugs readily available to occultists during this period were "vision-producing" meant that they became simply one means of achieving desired magical ends. Drugs facilitated and embellished that sought-after combination of desire, the "imaginative faculty," and the honed magical will or intent that experienced practical occultists associated with "the magical process."

Occultists, of course, understood that "imagination is a reality," and that "when the Imagination creates an image—and the Will directs and uses that image, marvellous magical effects may be obtained." Magicians of the Golden Dawn were taught that "Imagination is the Creative Faculty of the human mind, the plastic energy—the Formative Power," but that it must be harnessed to the magician's will in an intense display of controlled creativity if powerful and desired magical effects are to be achieved. They were reminded of the Cabalistic teaching "that man, by his creative power through Will and Thought" is "more Divine than the Angels."¹⁰ And while it is clear that not all magicians regarded "creative" astral experiences as real in the most literal sense, indeed, some regarded them as a kind of experiential metaphor, they nevertheless understood the richly visualized occult domains and beings that inhabited them to be symbolic of powerful natural forces. As Annie Besant noted, "Magic is the use of the Will to guide the powers of external nature," and the complex arcana of magical practice was dedicated to understanding, accessing, and ultimately controlling a real if symbolically

represented and invisible natural world.¹¹ Magicians were thus taught how to conduct themselves in the Astral Light, recognize different astral planes and beings, “test” their experiences by reference to magical signs and passwords, and protect themselves in hazardous situations. Astral journeying was acknowledged by magicians to be potentially dangerous. Their understanding, based on experience, was that the planes were not always welcoming, just as celestial or other beings were not always friendly or easy to read. Early journeys were often fraught affairs, and novices returned exhausted from their forays. But those who were knowledgeable and expert in Astral Travel, and familiar with the means of astral defense and attack, could maintain a two-hour astral journey without undue stress.

The acquisition of magical knowledge and skills, however, was a painstaking and sometimes arduous business. One rare account of a young fledgling magician’s introduction to the practice of “Rising on [sic] the Planes” details his attempts to master the necessary techniques associated with Astral Travel. When Victor Neuburg began an exhaustive ten-day Magical Retirement in June 1909 as part of his early training in Aleister Crowley’s Magical Order, he was expected to put into practice the basic principles of Astral Travel as learned by Crowley a decade earlier in the Golden Dawn. Crowley was exacting and idiosyncratic as a magical Master, and a Magical Retirement was not a prerequisite of training in the Golden Dawn; but Neuburg’s account of his experiences provides a valuable insight into the practical application of Golden Dawn teachings.¹² Neuburg had already been instructed in the importance of protective procedures, and knew how to perform the preparatory “lesser banishing ritual of the Pentagram,” designed to purify the operational environment of disturbing influences and distracting elements of the mundane personality. Neuburg conducted each session as Omnia Vincam, a novice magician, and strove to assume and maintain his initiated magical personality. He was always dressed appropriately in his magic robe, and had with him the necessary magical implements, including his ritual sword. Neuburg also knew the value of incense in helping to promote the right atmosphere for “Rising.” Crowley’s guidelines for travel on the astral planes were undoubtedly identical to those he published in *The Equinox* three months later:

Imagine an image of yourself, standing in front of you. Transfer your consciousness to it. Rise upward. Invoke the forces desired by the prescribed methods. Observe their appearance. Test their authenticity. Enter into conversation with them. Travel under their guidance to the particular part of the universe which you desire to explore. Return to earth.¹³

At the beginning of his Retirement, and after some initial confusion with the tracing of his protective figures, Neuburg settled down to some simple yoga techniques and ritual incantations designed to concentrate the mind.

It appears that Neuburg used intense introspection to enter the Astral Light rather than the Tattwas of advanced Golden Dawn initiates, and on the third day of the Retirement he finally managed a successful journey. The account of this experience indicates that Neuburg (like Crowley) conceived of "Rising" in direct and literal terms as winged flight, and that he understood at least something of the purposes, procedures, and perils of Astral Travel. Neuburg succeeded in flying up

through many spheres, courts, places, and shores. I asked everyone for information respecting myself. All were ready to give it upon my showing them my [magical] credentials, but all concealed daggers behind their backs to slay me. Perceiving this, I slew everyone I met without mercy. . . . Shortly after I had to return, which I did fairly easily: I think my wings are very tired.¹⁴

Crowley had taught Neuburg that he was to use his astral experiences in part to gain knowledge, both of himself and of occult planes, and had shown him the magical signs necessary for a productive reception. Neuburg apparently understood how to give the correct magical response to an astral challenge, a kind of astral "Who goes there?" and was thus able to extract from astral beings the knowledge he sought. The value of this knowledge, however, could be guaranteed only by testing the authenticity of astral beings. Crowley was subsequently to stress that it is vital to be able to distinguish between authentic astral phenomena and figments of the personal imagination. He emphasized that the major "object of astral research" is communication "with an independent intelligence" and warned that "[n]othing is easier than to suggest visions, or to fashion phantasms to suit one's ideas." He taught that "[w]e must not assert the 'reality' or 'objectivity' of an Astral being on no better evidence than the subjective sensation of its independent existence. We must insist on proof."¹⁵

Magical signs and passwords were used to test and provide "proof" of the authenticity of astral experiences, but Neuburg was inexperienced and it is not clear that he either knew or adopted these measures. He was certainly not familiar with advanced Golden Dawn techniques, which included a process of intoning, or "vibrating," magical names. Advanced initiates knew how to vibrate a name while simultaneously filling the controlling consciousness with a sense of the relevant otherworldly place or presence. This exercise of the "magical" imagination gave rise to a safe and vivid three-

dimensional astral experience in which unsavory presences were automatically excluded and bona-fide astral beings appeared. During the Retirement Neuburg seemed to accept the authenticity of the astral phenomena he encountered, although Crowley would interpret and comment upon his experiences as related in the account he wrote after each session. Crowley had, however, taught his Probationer how to deal with particularly troublesome entities, those who prevented him from advancing on his journey, and Neuburg was able to “slay” them in combat using his sword. Neuburg experienced this in graphic physical terms, but it meant in effect, as Neuburg was perhaps aware, overcoming or eradicating those “astral” elements that captured his attention and stood in the way of conversation with what Crowley referred to as his Holy Guardian Angel, or union with his highest Self.

In his account, however, Neuburg shows no inclination to conjecture as to the precise nature of the beings he encountered on his travels. It is also possible that Crowley had not yet acquired the sophisticated understanding of later years. He was to write that magic

enables us to receive sensible impressions of worlds other than the “physical” universe (as generally understood by profane science). These worlds have their own laws; their inhabitants are often of quasi-human intelligence. . . . “Astral” beings possess knowledge and power of a different kind from our own. . . . It is *more convenient* to assume the objective existence of an “Angel” who gives us new knowledge than to allege that our invocation has awakened a supernormal power in ourselves.¹⁶

Here Crowley carefully signals caution over the terms *physical*, *Astral*, and *Angel*, and acknowledges that such terms represent merely a “convenient” means of conceptualizing more complex or abstract processes and properties. This awareness that astral phenomena might represent a metaphorical realization of “supernormal” powers or occult natural forces might not have been in place in 1909; or Crowley might simply have elected not to overburden his Probationer with conceptual niceties. Certainly Neuburg experienced astral phenomena as externalized and real in the most literal sense, just as he conceived of “Rising on the Planes” in straightforward terms of leaving the body and entering unknown worlds.

In fact, early in the Retirement Neuburg noted with exasperation the slowness of his progress and clumsiness of his technique: “My body is a damned nuisance. Any decent *yogi* must work outside it. I would like to get out and stay there.”¹⁷ As the Retirement proceeded, Neuburg found that he was better able to “get out” of his body. He began to experience what

seemed like lengthy sojourns in the Astral Light, rising up through countless planes and spheres of existence and remaining there for increasing periods of time. His journeys became more detailed and vivid. He encountered warriors, giants, and monsters, some of whom destroyed him in his astral form and chased him back into his earthly body. He suffered horrific mutilation and physical torment (“a great angel . . . branded me on the breast with hot irons”), but also experienced moments of wonder and joy. Neuburg passed through the courts of ancient Egyptian deities, and watched Pan at play in the primordial forest. At times there was erotic symbolism and sexual temptation: “With the sword I rent asunder a veil shaped like a *Pudendum*; entered, and embraced a beautiful woman. . . . She sought to detain me after I had loved her, but I left her.” Equally, much of what Neuburg encountered had magical significance: particular colors and shapes signified occult forces, certain angels or giants had an occult pedigree and were instantly recognizable, a cross bathed in golden light with a rose at its center was a reference to the Rosicrucian tradition. At times Neuburg’s naïve sense of the astral “I” changed. He experienced his “Travelling” self as a green triangle in a violet circle, followed by “a blazing comet flaming in the hair of a God; then a Flaming Star.” There were moments when he “became absorbed in, and identified with, white light. This experience was accompanied by extreme ecstasy.”¹⁸

Like most novices, Victor Neuburg often returned exhausted from these journeys. He sometimes had trouble getting back into his body and when he regained normal consciousness would be uncoordinated and breathing heavily. His lengthy and sometimes grueling journeys in the Astral Light could last for thirty or more earthly minutes and were utterly real to him. Crowley used the record of events in Neuburg’s *Magical Record* to correct or adjust his technique. Indeed, towards the end of his Retirement Neuburg began to experiment with embryonic forms of dual consciousness suggestive of a sophisticated development of the “I” as associated simultaneously with the magician’s will and the consciousness of the astral body. This helped him to establish an effective *modus operandi* for Astral Travel:

I find that I can fly better by using half my mind to concentrate on the soaring, and half to wander as it likes. The effect of this is curious; below, it is dark and confused; above, it is always light and blue-gold. One has the sensation of perpetually passing through clouds.¹⁹

The point here is that Neuburg was learning a specific form of mental operation in which the initiated personality was in “willed” control of the “flight,”

but the astral self was completely open to any and every experience. The element of control was vitally important. It is probably for this reason that Crowley taught Neuburg to avoid the temptation of identification with and absorption in one kind of astral phenomena, the radiant white light that offered ecstatic annihilation of a sense of separateness or self. Ultimately, then, this kind of exercise was aimed at gaining perfect control of travel on the astral planes, and Neuburg was probably expected to do too much too soon. After all, in the Golden Dawn this kind of astral experience was reserved for advanced initiates who already possessed a wealth of magical knowledge. These magicians were expected to be in complete control of the astral self and able to interpret every situation or symbol with absolute accuracy. The careful training of Second Order Adepts was designed to facilitate ease of access to the Astral Light and a collective understanding of the phenomena of other worlds.

The visionary vocabulary required for Astral Travel was common currency among experienced occultists trained within the Golden Dawn tradition. This vocabulary was drawn from different venerable occult traditions, but it was also acquired as part of an ongoing process of magical exploration. Many of the journeys in the Astral Light were dedicated to gaining occult knowledge, and some of these travels were undertaken jointly or in groups. Accounts of these occasions illustrate two important points: first the type of information sought by magicians, and second the degree to which individual members of a group shared a common experience of their “Travelling in the Spirit Vision.” In 1900 a group of Golden Dawn Adepts met under the tutelage of Deo Date (Dorothea Hunter), an original member of Florence Farr’s “Sphere” group, “in order to investigate clairvoyantly the symbolism of the Sword.” The exercise began in familiar fashion. The proceedings started with the preliminary protective ritual of the Banishing Pentagram. Participants then made the appropriate sign of their grade within the Order, and invoked the aid of occult forces both mentally and via ritualistic signs and incantations:

We sat in a semi-circle at the North side of the Altar, facing the South, when Mars was in Virgo at the time. Deo Date then made the Invoking Hexagrams of Mars round the room, and the Pentagram of Virgo and the Mars symbol towards the South. We then mentally formulated the Hexagram of Mars in red light at that point of the compass. The upper triangle appeared flaming, and an armed figure of somewhat earthy type seemed to look through it. . . . We did not stop to examine this figure much, but went through the Hex. [sic] astrally and found ourselves in a region of flames. There we invoked the

White Light, vibrating the Names and holding our Swords towards heaven. This had the effect of attracting a rush of energy, Deo Date feeling it chiefly in her right arm, showing it to be an energy impelling to action. A gigantic, mail clad Angel appeared with winged helmet, and great flame-coloured wings from his shoulders. There was some diversity of opinion concerning his sword. One Frater thought that the Angel (who was evidently Phaleg) had the hilt in one hand and the point in the other, while the blade seemed to encircle the universe. Another Frater saw it as the Flaming Sword. Others of us saw it as a straight shaft of white flame. We all held the points of our swords to the Angel's breast from which rushed such tremendous force that our arms received a sort of electric shock.²⁰

Here we have the passage undertaken astrally from a room at 36 Blythe Road, London, the Second Order's premises, to a "region of flames"—a journey undertaken individually but in mental unison. The information sought by the group concerning sword symbolism was acquired towards the end of their "flight." Servio Liberaliter concluded from all that they experienced and were told on this occasion that the path of the sword "is one of enlightenment as well as destruction."²¹ In this account, as in others describing magicians traveling together in their astral bodies and communicating freely while encountering identical astral conditions and phenomena, there is an emphasis on collective experience. This remains strikingly the case even when the precise nature of that experience or its interpretation differed slightly. It is perfectly possible to explain this in part by reference to the shared conceptual and symbolic framework within which magicians worked, something that accounts for close similarities in the interpretation of events and phenomena. Surviving accounts, however, suggest that while Adepts had considerable knowledge of what they might expect in particular occult realms, there was no prearranged script for Astral Travel. Indeed, the keynote of many of the mutual journeys in the Astral Light was exploration.

This was certainly the case when Fortiter et Recte (Annie Horniman) and De Profundis ad Lucem (Frederick Leigh Gardner), both Second Order Adepts, undertook a series of astral journeys to the planets in 1898. Over the course of nearly four months "F. E. R." and "D. P. L." "travelled" to Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, and Mercury. Annie Horniman was interested at the time in solar theories, but a popular fascination with the planets was also a marked feature of the period. In 1879 the Italian astronomer Schiaparelli had claimed to have observed canals on Mars, and Camille Flammarion and others supported his claim. Enormous public interest was sparked by the ongoing debate over the possibility of Martian life. The prospect was

fuelled in the public imagination when *Pearson's Magazine* serialized publication in 1897 of H. G. Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds*, with its fictionalized Martian invasion. The fascination with Mars found ultimate expression in Percival Lowell's *Mars and Its Canals* (1906), which suggested that intelligent beings had constructed the canals, and the debate continued with Alfred Russel Wallace's rebuttal the following year.²² Meanwhile, the theme was being played out among spiritualist mediums who claimed special knowledge of or contact with planetary civilizations. The most celebrated of these was Catherine-Elise Muller, better known by the pseudonym Helen Smith, whose mediumistic revelations of life on Mars were considered in Théodore Flournoy's highly successful *From India to the Planet Mars*, which was published in late 1899.²³ In 1902 Jung published his medical dissertation, which was based on his observation several years earlier of a fifteen-year-old medium, "S. W.," who was in fact his cousin Hélène Preiswerk. In semitrance "S. W." became the mouthpiece for a female spirit who spoke of her journeys to the spirit world and the stars, and who supplied details of life on Mars, with its flying machines and canals.²⁴ Six years later the topic of life on Mars was still circulating in occult circles.²⁵

The object of Horniman's and Gardner's excursions to the planets in 1898 was to visit, observe, and learn, and it is interesting that these journeys of exploration were undertaken during Horniman's years of exile from the Golden Dawn. Although Horniman was to strenuously oppose the "Secret Groups" when she returned to the Order, she was clearly not adverse to the practice of Astral Travel and chose to conduct her experiments with a Second Order friend and ally. Horniman kept a meticulous record of what occurred on these journeys in strict accordance with Golden Dawn practice, and her rich account of landscapes, "atmosphere," inhabitants, conversations, and the development of planetary civilizations is written in the matter-of-fact language of realism usually associated with records of Astral Travel.²⁶ It is unlikely, however, that the two magicians believed that they were visiting the actual planets. Ten years earlier Anna Kingsford had remarked scornfully that "certain Theosophists so called vainly imagine" that they are capable of visiting the "physical [planetary] Satellite," but this was unlikely to apply to advanced initiates of the Golden Dawn.²⁷ It is almost certain that Horniman and Gardner conceived of these journeys as explorations of the states or energies associated with each planet, and thought of their planetary experiences as real in the purely magical sense. If so, this was an example of two magicians "Travelling in the Spirit Vision" to astral realms that replicated in plastic form the occult force associated with a particular planet. The purpose of the journeys, echoing the imperialist enter-

prise, was to gain knowledge of these occult properties with a view to furthering their power as magicians.

The two magicians met at Annie Horniman's house on a regular basis in order to conduct these astral journeys. They created individual talismans for each planet and used them as they would have done a Tattwa to access the Astral Light. In the case of Saturn, for example, the first planet they visited, the talisman showed the symbol for Saturn "surrounded by a circle of indigo in a white ground." The first entry of Horniman's record describes the procedure they followed. Annie Horniman did the Banishing Pentagram and the Lesser Invoking Hexagram of Saturn, followed by the sign of her Golden Dawn grade and the Greater Hexagram of Saturn. She did this while facing "where that planet then was, in the East." Gardner invoked the magical names of Saturn: "We passed through the Hex. [sic] into an indigo & white ray & rose up a great distance until we saw a huge dark world before us." They landed on a barren mountain and called for a guide by making the appropriate sign for Saturn and vibrating its magical names. A tall, dignified, and winged male form appeared clad in half-armor. He gave the two magicians a great deal of information, and they saw something of life on this apparently "old & dying world." They learned that this was a highly sensitive and psychically attuned civilization, but one that was in decline. The inhabitants were suspicious and fearful, and "F. E. R." and "D. P. L." made themselves invisible so as not to unduly alarm them. Nevertheless, when Fortiter stood next to one "tall man in tight fitting black clothes & long dark rough hair" so that her companion could judge his height, "he felt my presence most intensely & almost had a fit." After a lengthy sojourn on Saturn the magicians felt that they had acquired a strong sense of its ruling "atmosphere," and had some difficulty shaking this off after their return to Earth.²⁸

Three weeks later they visited Jupiter for the first time. On this occasion Fortiter was more attuned to the planetary "atmosphere" than her partner, and consequently took the lead. Her companion had difficulty making headway and "was covered with a greyness like dust and cobwebs, as if from not working for a little. He invoked the Light & we then got on more quickly." Fortiter slowed her progress as necessary to accommodate the other magician. Jupiter, associated astrologically with deception and illusion, put up a number of smoke screens, which might have prevented less experienced practitioners from penetrating its secrets. Fortiter was keenly aware of "a strong atmosphere of illusion around us," and as they proceeded both magicians had to "test" phenomena continually in order to determine its authenticity. They succeeded, however, in calling up the services

of a suitable guide, who took the form of a tall, beautiful woman dressed in classical white robes edged with purple: "We made the LVX signs & she bowed gravely and seemed pleased to see us." Their guide instructed them on the well-ordered and balanced society of Jupiter, and the magicians saw for themselves several of its wise and dignified inhabitants. Their guide also conversed with them about "'your miserable World' & said that she had seen much of it and it had made her very sad." She noted that the ceaseless struggle against the "disease & unrest" that plagued the Earth "causes our lives to be very laborious and wasteful." The magicians did not welcome their return to Earth.²⁹

Of all their experiences on the planets, the journey to the Sun was the most powerful. In general, astral journeys of exploration were pursued until magicians could "rise" no further or powerful astral beings blocked their way. This journey proved telling for both Horniman and Gardner, causing them to move into ever more ephemeral astral modes of being and pushing them to their magical limits. As they neared the Sun

We saw a brightness before us & in time it formed into a glorious gold and orange angel with out-stretched wings & fair hair. . . . We now came to another angel clothed in a robe like diamonds with orange colour shining through. With a sword of light it stopped our path and we had to halt. We made the signs but still we could not progress. We begged to be taught the way ahead that through the figure alone was the way possible for us. It touched me on the palms of my hands & D. P. L. on his forehead as before. We went through it into bright light, leaving much of our grosser astral bodies behind. As we rose it was as if we were passing through a crevice in impenetrable solid light.³⁰

Annie Horniman recorded that at this point she was aware of her heart beating violently, seemingly indicating how delicate the balance was between the astral and temporal bodies. At the same time "the light became almost unbearable." Her companion had never before "been on a Tiphareth plane," and was thus shocked to encounter the great sacrificial cross and the "glorious form" upon it that were emblazoned across the sky. The two magicians learned that they, too, were to be sacrificed. Hanging upon a cross, Fortiter's last remaining inkling of "essence"—far removed, as she said, from the usual sense of "Self or individuality"—rose from her astral body. The strain of maintaining some link between this refined experience of "I" and the astral body proved utterly exhausting and "could not be borne for long." Both she and "D. P. L.," who in spite of his lack of expectation is recorded as

having had a similar experience, “reentered our [astral] forms on the crosses & then descended to our own bodies.” The attempt to reach the Sun was short lived but utterly overwhelming.³¹

As this episode indicates, the astral body was increasingly refined as magicians “rose” ever higher in the Astral Light. Finally, when Adepts felt that they could no longer sustain flight, met an insurmountable barrier (which invariably signaled the limit of their magical powers), or experienced the near-disintegration of personal astral consciousness, they returned, as Annie Horniman put it, “into their bodies.” This could be experienced quite literally as a physical descent back to Earth; in the case of Horniman and Gardner often a grim process of negotiating the unpleasant “atmosphere” surrounding London. The Golden Dawn taught that the return was achieved by reversing the process of the formation of the “Sphere of Astral Light,” and acknowledged that “the whole operation of ‘Skrying’ and ‘Travelling in the Spirit-Vision’ is of course fatiguing.” Aleister Crowley similarly instructed his neophytes to “Cause the Body of Light [astral body] to coincide spatially with the physical. Reconnect them. . . . Resume normal consciousness.”³² The resumption of “normal consciousness” seemed to entail a sense of coming back to oneself as we all do upon waking from a vivid dream. For magicians, though, this was neither a dream as we would understand it nor merely a mutually reinforcing fantasy. Although Astral Travel had dreamlike qualities, and while, as in fantasy, willed intent coupled with directed imagination was the key to the creation of any given scenario, magicians always worked on the assumption that the manifestations of personal consciousness can encompass meanings that outstrip the vagaries of the individual psyche. And this had implications not only for different forms of astral experience but also for inspirational visions and more seemingly orthodox emanations, such as dreams.

The theory and interpretation of dreams has exerted a special fascination that can be traced back through the earliest surviving records of ancient civilizations. The study of dreams has traditionally been associated with both spirituality and the supernatural world, and dreams held a privileged place in occult circles. Anna Kingsford, as she made clear in the preface to her *Dreams and Dream-Stories*, received many precious insights and revelations through the medium of dreams, and accepted that the personal guidance and inspired religious teachings she received in sleep were divine in origin.³³ Although Edward Maitland admitted that Kingsford used ether, a drug widely associated with visionary experience, he made a point of emphasizing that Kingsford’s “illuminations” were “in no way due to artificial stimulation of faculty, whether by means of drugs, or by ‘animal magnetism,’

‘mesmerism,’ or ‘hypnotism,’ or to the induction of any abnormal state.” He explained that these communications amounted to “the spontaneous operation of the Spirit in a soul duly luminous and responsive”:

Through such operation the perceptive point of the mind is indrawn and uplifted to a sphere transcending both the physical and the astral or magnetic, and one altogether superior—because interior—to those accessible to the mere lucid, sensitive, or clairvoyant; in that it is the inmost and highest sphere of man’s manifold nature, the celestial, or “kingdom within.”³⁴

In other words, the revelations received by Kingsford in her dreams were superior to the wisdom acquired in the usual “physical” state, or to anything that might be received in a state of clairvoyance. They even surpassed those achieved through the manipulations of consciousness required for communication with astral realms. Indeed, both Kingsford and Maitland stressed that Kingsford’s “illuminations” did not come from any external source. Maitland informs us that Kingsford’s own “angel-genius” finally confirmed that Kingsford was merely “divinely enabled” to recover in sleep the knowledge and wisdom that “she” had at one level possessed through countless earthly incarnations.³⁵

Kingsford taught that every “human spirit-soul has attached to him a genius,” referred to in other traditions as a demon, an angel, or a ministering spirit, and that the “genius is the moon to the planet man, reflecting to him the sun, or God, within him.” Her notion of the genius was closely related to the concept of the impersonal divine or highest Self of the Theosophists and magicians (the “voice of the angel-genius is the voice of God”), but Kingsford conceptualized the genius in more literal terms and conceived of it as “always the converse of the [human] planet’s [sex].” She noted, “My genius looks like Dante, and like him is always in red. And he has a cactus in his hand, which he says is my emblem.”³⁶ Kingsford’s relationship with her “genius” was personal and intense, and her communication with him often took the form of conversations. The majority of these were apparently of an intimate or delicate nature, referring either to current difficulties in her life or to her past lives, and were deemed unsuitable for publication. Some, however, dealt with the broader spiritual issues that consumed many of her waking hours, and the leading question of her own role in the revelations to which she seemingly had such privileged access.

Responses to her anxieties and questions were often received in dreams. Anna Kingsford recorded the following in February 1880:

I heard last night in my sleep a voice speaking to me, and saying—

1. You ask the method and nature of Inspiration, and the means whereby God revealeth the Truth.
2. Know that there is no enlightenment from without: the secret of things is revealed from within.
3. From without cometh no Divine Revelation: but the Spirit within beareth witness.
4. Think not I tell you that which you know not: for except you know it, it cannot be given to you.³⁷

On this and other occasions, and like the spiritualists to whom she judged herself superior and sought to distance herself, Kingsford was reassured by an apparently second party—either her “genius” or another messenger who came to her in dreams. Responsible and religiously inclined spiritualists had similar experiences of a familiar and trusted spirit who gave spiritual help during séances or in private moments, but spiritualism was predicated on the understanding that visitors from the spirit world (usually the spirits of the dead) were quite distinct from any aspect of the believer’s personality and brought with them knowledge of which the questioner was unaware. By contrast, Kingsford was told that “there is no enlightenment from without,” and viewed the “genius” as “the complement of the man.”³⁸ In fact, as Maitland points out, the responses received by Kingsford often surpassed the ability of either him or Kingsford to understand them at the time. Only later, he says, did many of the communications “demonstrate themselves to us as necessary and self-evident truths . . . thereby proving their independence of our own limitations.”³⁹ He, like the spiritualists, offered this as proof of the communications’ authenticity. On the other hand, the spirits of the spiritualists did not claim that “the secret of things is revealed from within” or make a habit of appearing in dreams.

As Kingsford’s writings make plain, however, her “illuminations” were not always received in sleep. She had visionary experiences while awake, but also gave voice in apparently spontaneous trance to the teachings she was simultaneously receiving, and wrote communications down while in a trance-like state immediately upon awakening from an important dream. Again, aware that some of this seemed uncomfortably close to spiritualist practice, which relied heavily on the mediumistic trance, Kingsford was concerned to know what distinguished her experiences from those of the medium. In the same communication of February 1880 she was informed that “the Spirit of the Prophet beholdeth God with open eyes. If he fall into a trance, his eyes

are open, and his interior man knoweth what is spoken by him.” It is only, Kingsford was told, when “a man speaketh that which he knoweth not, he is obsessed: an impure spirit, or one that is bound, hath entered into him.” In contrast, “God obsesseth no man; God is revealed . . . God hath revealed the truth to thee from within.”⁴⁰ Kingsford was consistently guided toward an understanding that what differentiated her “illuminations” from the received wisdom of the conventional spiritualist medium was their origin from within herself:

The genius is not an informing spirit. He can tell nothing to the soul. All that she receives is already hers. But in the darkness of the night, it would remain undiscovered, but for the torch of the angel who enlightens. “Yea,” says the angel genius to his client, “I illuminate thee, but I instruct thee not. I warn thee, but I fight not. I attend, but I lead not. Thy treasure is within thyself. My light showeth where it lieth.”⁴¹

Far from nullifying or diminishing the possible authority of Kingsford’s pronouncements, the knowledge that her source of inspiration lay in the “kingdom within” convinced her not only of the authenticity of what was revealed but also that she was, indeed, a seeress and a prophet.

Anna Kingsford, in common with many occultists, believed that what she referred to as the soul often leaves the body during sleep. She cited with approval the views of Neoplatonic philosopher Iamblichus, who held that “[t]he soul has a two fold life, a lower and a higher. In sleep the soul is liberated from the constraints of the body, and enters, as an emancipated being, on its divine life of intelligence. . . . The night-time of the body is the day-time of the soul.”⁴² This view was echoed by Theosophists. A. P. Sinnett acknowledged that “the occultist can project his soul from his body,” and Annie Besant taught that “[t]he Spiritual Man is free during sleep” and lives “in realms on other planes, in realms which are the land of reality, called dreams on our plane of illusion.” Besant conceived of this in terms of the removal of self-consciousness from the sleeper’s physical body, and acknowledged that occultists sought “to arouse Self-consciousness in the dream-world” so that it “may be established therein with clear and definite vision.”⁴³ Similarly, Mabel Collins subscribed to the view that the spirit is released during sleep and argued for the importance of the dream state and for the reality of dream life.⁴⁴ And W. B. Yeats learned about the occult power of dreams during his early encounter with Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky’s envoy, Mohini Chatterji. For Theosophists, then, the dream often signified one phase of the operation of “consciousness of Being” or “Su-

per-consciousness” on the astral plane, and was taken seriously as a manifestation of otherworldly import. Practical occultism, however, taught Adepts not only how to establish self-conscious control of “the dream-world” but also how to travel in the astral body while in the sleep state. Magicians regarded visionary and sleep states as alternative media in which to continue their occult activities, and Florence Farr undoubtedly had this in mind when she noted that the “dream of the sage is a consciously guided dream.”⁴⁵

Members of the Golden Dawn experimented with Astral Travel while asleep in order to meet the astral forms of fellow magicians, and Aleister Crowley claimed that his astral body on these occasions was “so powerful that it was clearly visible to the physical vision of all but the grossest types of humanity.” Echoing the theme of George du Maurier’s best-selling novel of the 1890s, *Peter Ibbetson*, Crowley maintained that he and Soror Fidelis (Elaine Simpson) visited each other regularly and by mutual arrangement while physically separated. He commented archly in this connection that “her [astral] body was quite material enough to impress all the senses.”⁴⁶ Crowley’s description of the astral body on these occasions is similar to that of Victorian spiritualist mediums who reported encountering a marginally magnified version of themselves during materialization séances:

Our astral bodies, as we had got them, were replicas of our physical bodies, save that they were slightly larger. Hers, for example, was just over six feet high instead of five feet seven inches. The body was self-luminous and partially transparent, so that I could see the background behind her, much as through a muslin curtain. The substance of the body appeared homogeneous. It was usually [ritually] clothed and crowned. The materials were of the same quality of matter as the body, but could be distinguished from flesh by such optical devices as colour and reflections. We moved according to the laws of the astral plane; that is, without making the normal physical actions, though we were able to use our limbs in the ordinary way. We communicated, sometimes by audible speech, sometimes by direct transmission of thought such as occurs every day in ordinary life, when one knows what a friend is going to say before he says it.⁴⁷

Crowley, who had a notorious reputation and was given to amused self-aggrandizement, was not always reliable in such matters. Certainly his description of the astral body did not accord with other more prosaic accounts of a literal and perfectly lifelike “double.” Nevertheless, the fact that magicians did seek each other out in astral form while asleep is borne out by more reliable sources.

Chief among these are the recorded experiences of W. B. Yeats and Maude Gonne, whose intense spiritual relationship and mutual interest in Celtic symbolism were pursued in dreams and visions during the late 1890s and early 1900s. Gonne described an incident that foreshadowed their later encounters in a letter written from Dublin in 1895 while Yeats was in London. The purpose of Gonne's letter, which implicitly acknowledges the Theosophical influence within the Golden Dawn as well as the Order's practical training, was to inquire whether Yeats was "doing any occult work into which I came" and to tell him about the "occult interview" she had just had with him:

Yesterday evening . . . somewhere about 9 o'clock I was sitting in the drawing room of this hotel with several persons when suddenly I became conscious that you were there, standing near a table on which your book which I had been reading lay. Those in the room knew nothing of occultism & would not have understood. So mentally I gave you rendezvous for midnight when I knew they would be gone & said when sleep had set my soul free I would go with you where you liked.⁴⁸

Gonne, whose visionary capacity often disturbed her, goes on to describe how she accordingly "got into half-waking half-sleeping state" and accordingly met Yeats "and together we went down to the cliffs at Howth, but the sea birds were all asleep & it was dark & so cold, & the wind blew so horribly." Commenting that she "came back & quite woke up, but I knew you were still not far off," Gonne reveals that she lulled herself back to sleep with a fantasy of "taking chloroform or some strong narcotic." She had in fact resorted to taking chloroform to help her sleep after the death of her son, Georges, in August 1891, but had subsequently managed to give it up. Finally, Gonne recounted how she had then encountered images of the Tattwas before once again managing to get free of her body. Concerned that her letter sounded odd, Gonne urged Yeats to burn it and write with any information that might help her understand the details of the experience. In fact, on the evening that Maud Gonne had seen a vision of Yeats in her hotel drawing room, he had been closeted with Arthur Symonds, talking of his love for her.⁴⁹

While other magicians acknowledged that the astral body could sometimes make an unwilling and inadvertent appearance, the point of nocturnal travel in the astral body was that (like all magical practice) it should be both willed and controlled. It was akin to Florence Farr's "consciously guided dream," but with the added proviso that in this case two or more dreaming

consciousnesses were working as one. The unplanned astral encounter between Gonne and Yeats, in which he unknowingly appeared to her and she went on to envision a meeting of which he was unaware, was a naive example of the closely coordinated visions and astral unions they experienced following their “spiritual marriage” in 1898 and its renewal a decade later. Nevertheless, if this was an undisciplined and unsophisticated glimpse of what was to come, it serves as a reminder that much of the astral work that was undertaken by practical occultists was predicated on the understanding that individual minds can be linked in order to access a mutuality of visionary experience.

Yeats appeared to Gonne at a moment in which each had been thinking of the other (she had been reading his book, he was discussing her with great ardor), while Yeats’s own early exposure to the magical powers of S. L. and Moina MacGregor Mathers had involved his experience of a lengthy three-way visionary process. On that occasion MacGregor Mathers had performed an evocation using the Enochian tablet of many-colored numbered squares, and as he pronounced the magical words Yeats had the sense that his imagination was operating without his volition. He also recognized that the waking visions he witnessed “arose in three minds . . . without confusion, and without labour,” and regarded the phenomenon as “proof of the supremacy of imagination, of the power of many minds to become one.” Subsequently, and in common with his fellow occultists, Yeats came to view the meeting of minds in “a single, intense, unhesitating energy” as more than simply a testimony to the power and potential of the imagination and the human mind.⁵⁰

Drawing on his experience as a magician, Yeats elaborated his ideas in 1901 to include the notion of an accessible “great memory.” Here, in a clear rendition of several core beliefs prevalent within the Golden Dawn, he clarified what is signified for him by the term *magic*:

I believe in three doctrines, which have, as I think, been handed down from early times, and been the foundation of nearly all magical practices. These doctrines are:—

1. That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.
2. That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.
3. That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols.⁵¹

Yeats's view, based on personal experience, is that the boundaries of the mind are permeable and can both admit the consciousness of others and "create or reveal a single mind." Furthermore, he asserted that individual memory is merely one part of an all-encompassing "great memory," and he was to add later that it was his early experience with magic that convinced him "that images well up before the mind's eye from a deeper source than conscious or subconscious memory."⁵² Yeats firmly believed that "the main symbols (symbolic roots, as it were) draw upon associations which are beyond the reach of the individual 'subconsciousness.'"⁵³ This proposition reiterates in slightly different form the belief of Golden Dawn magicians like Yeats, that it is possible to access the "great memory" (like the "great mind") through the skilled use of symbols, and that these symbols act as a conduit to a deep source of ancestral or broad cultural "associations." The assumption that the proper use of carefully selected symbols could facilitate entry to a nonpersonal astral realm was familiar enough to Adepts, but the idea of moving beyond the personal and into ancestral memory became central to some of the astral work undertaken by Yeats and others during the late 1890s.

Like the MacGregor Matherses, Yeats was passionately interested in Celtic mythology and symbolism, and by 1897 the three were formulating plans for the establishment of a mystical Celtic Order. The Matherses were involved with the creation of the Order's major ceremonies and rituals and, like Yeats, knew that these relied upon the correct esoteric interpretation of Celtic legend. Consequently, they began to explore astrally the Celtic mythos using appropriate talismans as symbolic points of access in accordance with Golden Dawn procedure. They were intermittently joined in this slow and painstaking endeavor by Maude Gonne and other Golden Dawn Adepts. In 1897 Yeats headed a group that included Florence Farr and four other members of the Golden Dawn, and together they undertook astral journeys of exploration to investigate the full import of Celtic mythical figures, places, and artifacts. This work continued through the following year with the help of Gonne and George Pollexfen, Yeats's uncle and Golden Dawn initiate. Gonne "skried in the spirit vision" with Yeats, using talismans of his devising, and continued to have rich visionary experiences relating to their work when separated from him.⁵⁴

Interestingly, Yeats was sending Gonne a "dream drug," probably mescaline, in 1897, and Gonne pursued their occult goals in sleep.⁵⁵ Her lengthy account of a nighttime vision, which apparently belies her claim that "we seem to get more actual teaching when we are together," records how she underwent the initiation of the Spear of Lugh the Sun God.⁵⁶ Gonne de-

scribes here how she had performed two appropriate Celtic “ceremonies” before falling asleep, and how, in the course of her visionary experience, she was instructed as to procedure and symbolism for the new rituals of the Celtic Order:

before going to sleep I went through the ceremonies of the cauldron, the stone. Semias and Estras accompanied me, stood on each side of the bed when I lay down. I was just beginning to see Lug [sic] when a crowd of dark thoughts came over my mind. I had to get up & go through the ceremonies again. When I came to the place of the sword I invoked Brigid and saw her dimly, the black haired Usces, I asked their help, but this druid would not accompany me as the others did. I again lay down & this time fell into a deep sleep. I woke feeling very very tired & knew something had happened. I invoked Lug [sic] & asked to go through it again so as to remember. Then half waking, half sleeping, I saw Lug [sic] in his chariot. He touched me on the chest with the spear & I fell down on the ground & the fountain of fire played over me. Then he held out the spear over me & I grasped it & was raised to my feet through the fire fountain. I then got into the chariot & knelt there under Lug’s [sic] great shield. The chariot rose to a great height & stopped at last on what seemed to be a sort of dazzling white platform on which stood a white altar & on it was inscribed a golden sun & a red rose lay on it, I was told that rose incense should be used for Lug’s [sic] ceremonies. I found myself dressed in a long white shining garment [after episodes of testing and purification]. . . . The spear and shield were put into my hands & a voice said “The spear is to fight the forces of Darkness, the spear is to fight the enemies of Eire, the shield is to protect from the attack of adversaries.” Then all faded & grew dim & I fell sinking down, down to earth.⁵⁷

This sought-after dream (with its dénouement so akin to the experience of Astral Travel) was accepted by Yeats and Gonne as an authentic experience, and one that connected them to an otherwise unattainable source of ancestral wisdom. This and other astral and visionary experiences were used to provide insight and guidance as the rites of the new Order were slowly formulated.

As in all his magical undertakings, Yeats’s various experiences—his understanding of the power of words and ritual incantation, his knowledge of the power of symbols, his astral experiments and scrying sessions with Maude Gonne and Golden Dawn Adepts—led him to believe that “imagination is always seeking to remake the world according to the impulses and the patterns in that Great Mind, and that Great Memory.”⁵⁸ The personal

imagination, in other words, serves to reinterpret and elaborate that which already exists in the universal consciousness. Hence for Yeats and all magicians, visions, dreams, and much that was manifested through the power of the imagination were of potentially enormous significance. T. S. Eliot came close to identifying the occultists' position when he noted that "Mr. Yeats's dream is identified with Mr. Yeats's reality," although occultists would have added that there is a world of difference between the dreams of the Adept and those of the uninitiated.⁵⁹ It was the honed will in conjunction with the "active Imagination" that gave rise to the "consciously guided dream," and facilitated entry to the "Great Mind" and "Great Memory." It was this belief in an ultimate reality that lies "beyond the reach of the individual 'subconsciousness,'" but that can be accessed through the application of magical techniques which draw upon the mind's creative potential and its deepest resources, that affirmed for occultists the significance of dream or visionary experience. And it was also this belief that led occultists to distance themselves from what they took to be inadequate or misconceived explanations for the kind of experiences that they valued so highly. It was not enough, as Yeats put it in relation to his own earlier views, to "account for everything by the power of one imagination over another, or by telepathy, as the Society for Psychical Research would say."⁶⁰

Because, of course, about the time that occultists began to acquire the techniques of advanced ritual magic and explore occult reality, members of the Society for Psychical Research were turning their attention to phenomena with a direct bearing on occult, or "supernatural," experience. Psychical researcher Henry Sidgwick's group had begun its investigations of spiritualist phenomena in the 1870s, and during the following two decades members of the newly formed Society for Psychical Research pursued this and many other avenues of inquiry. In a stream of papers and several lengthy empirical studies, psychical researchers charted and sought explanations for a wide variety of "psychical" experiences, among them various kinds of trance states, the sighting of apparitions, and apparently inspired or clairvoyant dreams. Like occultists, they accepted the reality of these experiences (they accepted, in other words, that sane women and men can fall into trance, see ghosts, and receive special knowledge or "intimations" in dreams), and they postulated causal mechanisms that often relied upon an innovative understanding of the human mind. Not least, psychical researchers took seriously the notion that it is possible to forge unspoken links between individual human minds. Professor W. F. Barrett, a major force in the establishment of the Society for Psychical Research, felt that his experiments during the 1870s and 1880s substantiated his claim to be the discoverer of thought transfer-

ence, while it was the society's F. W. H. Myers who in 1882 coined the term *telepathy*.⁶¹

Occultists were often interested in the intellectual rationales of psychical researchers, but felt them to be limited. Nevertheless, even if telepathy was unequal to the task of total explanation in the eyes of those like Yeats, the establishment of this and related concepts did work to support an occult understanding and experience of self. In particular, telepathy and its role in clairvoyance (another phenomenon taken seriously by psychical researchers) goes some way towards validating the occultists' insistence on "super-normal" consciousness to explain apparently supernatural events. One of the first major undertakings of the Society for Psychical Research, the publication in 1886 of Edmund Gurney's *Phantasms of the Living*, considered phenomena with distinct relevance for practical occultism and sought to present them in the context of naturalizing explanation. The book, with which Myers and Frank Podmore were also involved, set out "to deal with all classes of cases where there is reason to suppose that the mind of one human being has affected the mind of another, without speech uttered, or word written, or sign made."⁶² It concentrated on "crisis apparitions" and examined examples of spontaneous appearance of, or communication from, a geographically distant individual who at the moment of contact was undergoing some kind of crisis—often death. This two-volume work catalogued and analyzed some 702 cases that had been collected by the Society for Psychical Research, and presented reasoned causal hypotheses that invoked the concept of telepathy and proposed the possibility of hallucination among the sane.

Phantasms of the Living reviews and classifies a broad body of material that, as Myers conceded in his introduction to the book, might seem at first glance to have little connection with the "mere transference of thought." The book employs the term *phantasm* to cover apparitions of all kinds—visual, auditory, and tactile, as well as less easily definable feelings of presence—and suggests that "transmission of thoughts or feelings . . . by other means than through the recognised channels of sense" could account for many of them.⁶³ In a wide-ranging discussion of externalized phenomena, Gurney likens the manifestation of apparitions through the medium of sight, hearing, or touch to veridical hallucination. Here, while lacking, as he puts it, "the objective basis which it suggests," the phantasm corresponds to something that is actually occurring elsewhere.⁶⁴

The notion of hallucination brings into play the idea that the percipient, or person who is perceiving the phantasm, is actively involved in the production of the apparition. This is an important and, given the Victorian

context, a brave and innovative point. Gurney uses the idea of hallucination to explain why the exact circumstances of an event were not necessarily reproduced in the phantasmagorical scene. His cases demonstrate that apparitions often took a perfectly mundane form, with an individual appearing and behaving exactly as in life, but that the scene and the figure could assume characteristics not in accordance with the original circumstances. Thus, a young woman might suddenly become aware of the figure of a close friend in the room, and perceive her in full day attire, suitably coiffured, and so on, when in fact, unbeknown to her, her friend was at that moment lying in bed and at the point of death. Gurney suggests that “the waking mind may unconsciously react, as in a dream, on the nucleus of a ‘transferred impression,’ and, in the act of externalising the percept, may invest it with its own atmosphere and imagery.”⁶⁵ The phantasm, in other words, is a kind of telepathic hallucination produced through the active and imaginative involvement of the percipient.

Gurney considered not only phenomena experienced during waking hours but also manifestations that occurred in dreams or in what he called the “borderland” state between waking and sleep. Equally, he examined collective cases, where several people simultaneously experienced the same manifestation or incident, and reciprocal ones in which both “percipient” and “agent” (or originator of the phantasm) apparently influenced each other. He noted that in collective cases the individual percipients were often in close physical proximity to one another, and suggested that mutual mental rapport might account for the similarity of the phantasmagorical scene witnessed on these occasions. Myers, in a note appended to the main part of the original edition of *Phantasms*, conversely hypothesized that collective cases might be likened to examples of “independent [or “travelling”] clairvoyance,” where a clairvoyant apparently visits places or observes objects quite independently of any other individual’s thought patterns or processes. Myers preferred to think that a scene independently witnessed by a group of individuals was an externalized manifestation of the agent’s actual conception of himself at such a scene.⁶⁶ For Gurney, as he complained in a letter to William James, this smacked too much of “a hopeless attempt to present a frankly material view of ghosts.”⁶⁷ Although he was not completely happy with his own analysis of collective cases, Gurney held more closely than did Myers to the creative, empathetic, and hallucinatory model.

Reciprocal cases he regarded somewhat differently. Reciprocity must presumably always be an element of telepathic communication, but what Gurney classified as reciprocal cases involved more than the usual degree of

mutuality. These were cases in which, as he says, there was every reason to suppose “that each of the parties might receive a telepathic impulse from the other, and so each be at once agent and percipient.” According to Gurney, such occurrences were extremely rare, but he judged that the most conclusive of them could be considered “*reciprocally* telepathic.”⁶⁸ One of the well-documented cases (which is both reciprocal and collective) that Gurney cites is that of a sick boy calling out the names of his sister and her friend, who were at the time five miles away, and describing to his mother, who was sitting with him, exactly what the girls were doing; simultaneously, and in just such a scene as the boy described, the girls inexplicably heard their names being called. This Gurney took to be an example of “a telepathic hallucination, reproducing the exact words that were in the mouth and ear of the sick boy; and, on his part, a vision reflected from their minds.” Because the boy “sees” what the girls were actually doing and the girls hear the very words spoken by him, Gurney is content to classify this and cases like it as possible examples of “telepathic clairvoyance.” He concludes that “what might be described as clairvoyance may be a true variety of thought-transference.”⁶⁹ Indeed, one of the final observations of *Phantasms* is that collective cases “lead us to regard individual minds, not as isolated units, but as all in potential unity.”⁷⁰

Perhaps not surprisingly, the book met with a mixed reception. Its explanatory framework required that readers accept the novel concepts of both thought transference and nonpathological hallucination, while there were those, like the American philosopher C. S. Peirce, who felt that the cases themselves failed to make the grade as acceptable evidence.⁷¹ But whether or not Gurney and his colleagues presented suitable documentation or a convincing argument respecting crisis apparitions, *Phantasms* did draw attention to the existence of what Myers calls in his introduction “incidents . . . of a *supernormal* kind.” He goes on to explain in a note, “by a supernormal phenomenon, I mean, not one which *overrides* natural laws, for I believe no such phenomenon to exist, but one which exhibits the action of laws higher, in a psychical aspect, than are discerned in action in every-day life.”⁷² This was precisely the line taken by occultists, and indeed, some of the incidents discussed in *Phantasms* are remarkably similar to occultists’ subsequent exercise of the “supernormal.” Occultists were not concerned with spontaneous crisis apparitions; the point of a magical training was to be able to reproduce “phantasms” at will. But occultists’ ability (as they saw it) to project and travel in the astral form and to work individually and collectively in astral mode comes close to the kinds of phantasmagorical reality that so

interested Gurney and Myers. And the entire apparatus of the occult supernormal rested on the assumption that individual minds can become one in more than “potential unity.”

Edmund Gurney died of an overdose of chloroform in 1888, and it was Myers who went on to develop a theory of the mind and of the self that addressed the reality of “psychical” manifestations that he subsumed under the term *supernormal*. Myers’s final theory of self was expounded in a series of articles appearing from 1892 onwards in the Society for Psychical Research’s *Proceedings*, and in the unfinished posthumous book, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903). The title of the book flags the author’s major concern, that of immortality; but it ranges across territory familiar to European medical psychologists, the Society for Psychical Research, and, with different taxonomies and rationales, occultists. *Human Personality* considers a wealth of phenomena—from somnambulism, hysteria, and multiple personality to telepathy, dreams, clairvoyance, and crisis apparitions—and presents the material in terms of a spectrum of possible human behaviors. What emerges from this approach is a theory of human personality in which the “supernormal” and “psychical” represent merely the further reaches of a general continuum of human potentialities.

Underpinning Myers’s conception of human personality, however, is his theory of the subliminal self. Myers, in common with leaders in the field of European medical psychology, rejected what he thought of as old-fashioned claims to a unitary self or consciousness and posited instead the “composite or ‘colonial’ character” of the human psyche. He argued that the conscious self, often experienced as “the plain man’s conviction that there is only one of him,” is merely one of several possible selves. Drawing upon the notion of a threshold (*limen*) of consciousness, he referred to the conscious self as “the empirical, the supraliminal Self” while emphasizing that this supraliminal self “does not comprise the whole of the consciousness or of the faculty within us.” He called that which lies below the threshold of consciousness “subliminal,” and used the term to embrace “*all* that takes place beneath the ordinary threshold, or say, if preferred, outside the ordinary margins of consciousness.”⁷³

Myers was influenced in his thinking by William James’s *Principles of Psychology* (1890) and adopted a similar approach to questions of consciousness. Like James, he favored “the stream of thought” model of mental activity, with supraliminal consciousness representing only one of many possible tributaries in the ebb and flow of consciousness. His notion of the fluidity of the supraliminal suggests a model of the mind in which there is always the potential for conscious manifestation, so that that which we might think of

as unconscious refers simply to those elements of consciousness that do not form part of the supraliminal self at any given moment. Myers spoke in terms of a "stream of consciousness" and preferred the term *subliminal* to either *unconscious* or *subconscious*.⁷⁴ Furthermore, he argued that the subliminal possesses a complexity and coherence that justifies the epithet "self":

Perceiving further that this conscious life beneath the threshold or beyond the margin seems to be no discontinuous or intermittent thing; that not only are these isolated subliminal processes comparable with isolated supraliminal processes . . . but that there also is a continuous subliminal chain of memory (or more chains than one) involving just that kind of individual and persistent revival of old impressions, and response to new ones, which we commonly call a Self,—I find it permissible and convenient to speak of subliminal Selves, or more briefly of a subliminal Self . . . and I conceive that there may be,—not only *co-operations* between these quasi-independent trains of thought,—but also upheavals and alternations of personality of many kinds, so that what was once below the surface may for a time, or permanently, rise above it. And I conceive also that no Self of which we can here have cognisance is in reality more than a fragment of a larger Self,—revealed in a fashion at once shifting and limited through an organism not so framed as to afford it full manifestation.⁷⁵

Myers was ultimately arguing, then, that the supraliminal "current of consciousness which we habitually identify with *ourselves*" amounts only to the current "field of view."⁷⁶ Elsewhere, below the threshold or beyond the margins live other selves, selves with independent existences and memories, selves that form part of the "larger Self."

Myers's conclusion that "[o]ur psychical unity is federative and unstable" placed him at the forefront of contemporary thinking on the nature of the self.⁷⁷ He was one of the first in Britain to draw attention to the ideas of Janet and Freud and, like them, was interested in "disintegrations of personality," such as hysteria and similarly dissociative states.⁷⁸ His work, however, differed from that of other innovators in key respects. First, in a marked departure from the influential idea that the functions of what others preferred to call the unconscious were intrinsically dissolutive, Myers chose to affirm the positive and integrative aspects of the subliminal. Second, he posited the existence of "an indwelling soul" and wrote it into his theory of the self. Myers's concept of a timeless "ruling and unifying . . . soul or spirit" that pre-exists and survives bodily incarnation and decay supplied the cohesive principle in his "colonial" theory of human personality. Furthermore, he ac-

cepted the reality of “a spiritual or metetherial environment” in which the soul originates and subsists, and hinted at the existence of what he termed “the World-Soul.” Certainly he assumed “in the man a soul which can draw strength and grace from a spiritual Universe, and conversely . . . in the Universe a Spirit accessible and responsive to the soul of man.”⁷⁹ These ideas put Myers at odds with secularly minded psychologists and philosophers and contributed to the marginalization of his work, but they suggest a kinship of sorts with the occult.

Myers was not an occultist, but his interests and predilections had exposed him to a wide range of occult theories. In particular, his dedication to the Platonic and Neoplatonic idea of the interpenetration of the spiritual and material worlds and his insistence that the subliminal could represent faculties of the highest order accorded closely with the views of occultists. Myers accepted that subliminal streams of consciousness included childlike and disintegrative facets of the personality but, unlike Janet and William James, argued that manifestations of the subliminal were neither rare nor necessarily symptomatic of the disintegration or degeneration of the personality. On the contrary, like the Theosophist who noted in 1893 that “it is true to say that all our deepest thoughts, our noblest aspirations proceed from the depths of the unconscious,” he argued that the subliminal could represent the articulation of supremely spiritual and creative powers.⁸⁰ Myers maintained that inspired “subliminal uprushes” account for the insights usually associated with creative genius or spiritual illumination, and suggested that the subliminal is capable of communicating concepts, ideas, and knowledge of events of which the supraliminal is unaware. More to the point, he proposed that the subliminal is capable of communicating information that cannot be explained in terms of individual experience or repressed memory. As critics like G. F. Stout, professor of logic and metaphysics at St. Andrews, recognized, this was a major distinguishing feature between Myers’s ideas and those of other psychologists.⁸¹

Myers subscribed to the view that it might be possible to acquire knowledge of past or future events without the telepathic intervention of any known human mind. He thought of this in terms of “direct supernormal percipience” and associated it with the idea of what occultists like Yeats called the “Great Mind” and “Great Memory.” Myers conjectured that there might be “something in the nature of Time which is to us inconceivable;—some co-existence of Past and Future in an eternal Now.” This implicit acknowledgment of time as a human construct and a concomitant questioning of our concept of historical consciousness are two of the major signifiers of cultural modernism at the fin de siècle; they also typified an occult per-

spective that recognized that "Time, Duration, Eternity, and Immortality are . . . ideals, not concrete things."⁸²

Florence Farr explored the illusory nature of time in her 1905 play *The Mystery of Time*, while Annie Besant taught that all events coexist in the Universal Memory and can be accessed by the Adept.⁸³ Myers suggested something similar when he ventured that it "may even be that some World-Soul is perennially conscious of all its past; and that individual souls, as they enter into deeper consciousness, enter into something which is at once reminiscence and actuality." The loose use of "individual souls" is typical of Myers, but he undoubtedly meant that the explanation for apparently inexplicable incidences of human retrocognition and precognition might lie in the relationship between the "deeper consciousness" of the subliminal self and a timeless "World-Soul" in which all events are eternally present.⁸⁴

G. F. Stout was close to the mark when he noted that Myers's theory of the subliminal self "has at least as much affinity with such conceptions as that of a tutelary genius or guardian angel" as it has with a modern understanding of the mind.⁸⁵ Myers himself might not have thought of the subliminal in terms of a unitary personality, celestial or otherwise, but his sense that the subliminal self can manifest "supernormal" percipience and spiritual wisdom certainly bears a clear resemblance to the occultists' notion of the "Genius" or the "Angelic" or "Higher Self." As we have seen, even though Anna Kingsford viewed her "angel genius" as a discarnate (male) personality she regarded the "genius" as "the complement of man" and was taught that "there is no enlightenment from without"; and, similarly, as Aleister Crowley subsequently commented, that what has traditionally been called an angel simply refers to the awakening of "a supernormal power in ourselves."⁸⁶ Occultists understood that the admonition to "Know Thyself" was in part the call to develop the "Divine Self," and knew that this involved a deep commitment to the development of higher consciousness—of what Kingsford conceived as the "kingdom within" and Florence Farr called "consciousness of Being." Myers's appreciation of the inestimable value of the subliminal self and its capacity to inform, guide, and inspire points in the direction of Jung's subsequent work, while his theorizing of its potential relationship to the "supernormal" spoke to much that advanced occultists were claiming for their own practice: "Supernormal events may be, but nothing is supernatural."

This concept of the relationship between the subliminal self and the supernormal found further expression in Myers's attitude towards dreams. Occultists had a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of dreams and dream phenomena, but dreams exerted a more general fascination that

found expression in a fin-de-siècle boom in the publication of “dream books” and calls for the Society for Psychical Research to follow up its Census of Hallucinations with a similar undertaking on dreams.⁸⁷ Psychologists and philosophers, too, were seriously interested in dreams and dreaming. There is a strong nineteenth-century European tradition of the study of dreams, but the decline of Romanticism saw a shift in emphasis away from a concern with the spiritual and creative possibilities of dreams and towards an interest in the underlying functions of the dream process. The work of the three midnineteenth-century pioneers of dream investigation, Karl Albert Scherner, Louis Ferdinand Alfred Maury, and M.-J.-L. Hervey de Saint-Denys, relied on systematic observation and experimentation and highlighted issues like the operation of dream imagery and the roles of sensory stimulation and memory. In fact Scherner, like the Romantics, was interested in dream symbolism and questions of meaning, but causation and mechanics took precedence as the century drew to a close.⁸⁸ Henri Bergson, for example, was extremely interested in both the stimulus-response theory and the role of memory in dreams, while in England Havelock Ellis strove to synthesize the causative factors of emotion, physical sensation, and memory in a theory of dreams that acknowledged the interrelationship of mind and body.⁸⁹

Thus one of the most startling aspects of Freud’s *Die Traumdeutung* (The interpretation of dreams) when it was published at the end of 1899 was his return to an emphasis on symbolic interpretation, which had stalled with Scherner nearly half a century earlier.⁹⁰ Freud’s book, of course, considered not only the importance of symbolism for dream analysis but drew on the work of Maury and others to establish an innovative model of the dream process. But while its German title was provocatively reminiscent of *Stern-deutung* (astrology), Freud’s classic was concerned with a secular understanding of the mind and made every effort to steer well clear of spiritual issues and the occult. Towards the end of his life Freud was to publicly address the question of the relationship between dreams and occultism, and when he did so he made cautious use of the concept of telepathy as a possible explanation for the traditional association of dreams with prescience.⁹¹

It was Myers, so attuned to all that was happening in the world of international fin-de-siècle psychology, who came closest to a return to the noumenal in his consideration of dreams. His work was based not on the experimental method but on his assertion that dreams and the process of dreaming bear a marked similarity to hypnosis and hypnotic phenomena. Myers, who admired Gurney’s experimental work on hypnosis and similarly followed Janet’s research, held that during sleep—as in the hypnotic trance—

the supraliminal gives way to the subliminal with all that that implies. The work of Gurney and Janet led him to propose that dream memory, like hypnotic memory, might possess a continuity and life of its own, while dreams themselves could represent the emergence of faculties that are superior to anything manifested in the waking state.

Myers was convinced partly from the evidence contained in accounts collected by the Society for Psychical Research that dreamers are capable of supernormal perception ranging from precognition and clairvoyant vision to communication with discarnate spirits. In fact, he explicitly states that the subliminal self mediates between the material and spiritual worlds while “the organism” sleeps:

Our human life . . . exists and energises, at the present moment, both in the material and in the spiritual world. Human personality, as it has developed from lowly ancestors, has become differentiated into two phases; one of them mainly adapted to material or planetary, the other to spiritual or cosmic operation. The subliminal self, mainly directing the sleeping phase, is able either to rejuvenate the organism by energy drawn in from the spiritual world;—or, on the other hand, temporarily and partially to relax its connection with that organism, in order to expatiate in the exercise of supernormal powers;—telepathy, telaesthesia, ecstasy.⁹²

Here Myers is drawing attention to what he called in his appended note to Gurney’s *Phantasms of the Living* “independent clairvoyance,” and promotes his apparent belief in the ability of the subliminal self to “partially relax its connection with” the body while in the sleep state and operate independently of corporeal strictures. He pressed the claims of a “sleeping spirit,” which is “susceptible of relations unfettered by spatial bonds,” is capable “of telaesthetic perception of distant scenes,” and can manifest and travel in worlds other than our own.⁹³ So close is this to occultists’ view of the realities of “the dream-world” that Myers needed only the conceptual vocabulary of the Adept to complete the picture. Conversely, within a few short years those who moved in occult circles had adopted Myers’s terminology and referred to the fact that “the subliminal”—“the mentor, the one who knows”—“can yet disengage itself and explore the vast unknown continents of Memory and Mind.”⁹⁴

In occult practice the exploration of “vast unknown continents” was intimately bound up with the exercise of willed imagination. Whether undertaken in the waking or the sleep state, Astral Travel was predicated on the Adept’s ability to both create and control the experience. Myers suggested

that the “integrating faculty,” or “that increased power over all strata of the personality,” lay at the root of genius and argued that control of the subliminal faculties in sleep accounted for some creative masterpieces as well as supernatural phenomena. He noted that Robert Louis Stevenson’s fictional plots were often created during what Myers called dreams “self-suggested by the waking will,” and that Stevenson put much of his success down to the nighttime activities of the “little people who managed man’s internal theatre.” Stevenson acknowledged that he sought to direct his dreams with a view to creating “printable and profitable tales,” and that while asleep his creative faculties were taken over by Brownies, who “tell him a story piece by piece, like a serial, and keep him all the while in ignorance of where they aim.”⁹⁵ Anna Kingsford similarly noted that her dreams sometimes supplied the framework for her published fictional stories, but Stevenson’s account emphasizes the combination of willed control and the independent life of the imagination that was so central to advanced practical occultism.

Interestingly, Hervey de Saint-Denys had argued that dream scenarios could be created by the imagination without reference to individual memory, and had explored the suggestibility or plasticity of dreams. His techniques for directing his dreams were so arduous, however, that few followed his example. One who did was Frederik van Eeden, a Dutch researcher and poet, who began to experiment with dream control during the 1890s, when magicians were first seeking to master their astral lives in the dream state. Van Eeden went on to write a novel on the theme, and finally reported his experimental findings in a paper that referred to dream meetings with the dead and with nonhuman personalities. His paper was published by the Society for Psychical Research, but since then there has been little research interest in the willed control of dreams.⁹⁶

Ultimately Myers was concerned with directed sleep as evidence of the possibility of integrating the subliminal and supraliminal. He associated the ability to coordinate the waking and sleeping phases of existence with genius, and suggested that the “developed sleep” of the hypnotic trance merely replicates what “the man of genius” can achieve without the aid of external suggestion.⁹⁷ Myers’s discussion of crystal gazing or scrying ran along similar lines. He argued that scrying is “no ‘occult practice’ or superstitious fancy,” but rather “the empirical development” of supernatural processes. He suggested that a gift for crystal vision “often goes along with *telepathic* sensibility,” but conceived of scrying as a possible means of developing “the *control of inward vision*.” Again, he made the connection between crystal gazing and “hypnotic suggestion as an empirical means of establishing that control” but, like occultists, understood the critical distinction be-

tween self-conscious control and that imposed from without.⁹⁸ Both self-willed control of dreams and crystal gazing—the one a sleeping and the other a waking endeavor—suggested to Myers the possibility of extending and developing conscious control over the full range of human faculties.

His interest in dreams and crystal visions was underpinned by the assumption that it is here that the subliminal—for Myers a potentially superior “stream of consciousness”—is made manifest. Like the occultists who were his contemporaries and Jung whose work was to follow, Myers was interested in recognizing and tapping the infinite resources of the unconscious. Occultists already understood that dreams and scrying represented a means of entry into hidden realms and sought through the techniques of magical practice to reach a rapprochement with all that they found there. Myers was content to let matters rest with the acknowledgment that in crystal gazing “normal and supernormal knowledge and imaginings are blended in strangely mingled rays,” while certain dreams possess “an unexplained potency . . . drawn, like the potency of hypnotic suggestion, from some depth in our being which the waking self cannot reach.”⁹⁹

Myers’s notion of the intermingling of “normal and supernormal knowledge and imaginings” and its parallel in the “subliminal uprushes” that he associated with genius and noumenal experience defines his conception of human consciousness. His sympathies lay with all that was most innovative in the contemporary study of the mind, but his valorization of the nondiscursive subliminal elements of consciousness, and his conviction that they provide knowledge and experience of the “World-Soul,” echoed Romantic ideals and set him apart from many of the researchers he most admired. Considerable affinity with the work of Bergson, William James, Janet, and Flournoy was matched by very real differences in conception and approach, and of these contemporaries only Flournoy pursued that creative aspect of the unconscious that so interested Myers.

While both Bergson and Janet referred to what the latter termed the “fonction fabulatrice” of the unconscious, Flournoy explored it at length in his work with “Helen Smith” and other spiritualist mediums. He concluded in *From India to the Planet Mars* that “Helen Smith’s” accounts of her previous incarnations and her descriptions of life on Mars were “romances of the subliminal imagination” that were built around forgotten memories.¹⁰⁰ Myers thought that Flournoy’s study of “Helen Smith” was very evenhanded, but he thought of subliminal imagination in terms that outstripped explanations based on deeply buried memory or other obvious traces of supraliminal life. He associated the subliminal with expressions of the supernormal but equally considered it capable of quite independent “imaginings.” He

was apparently interested in the idea of the mythopoeic in relation to what he took to be a specifically fictionalizing and mythologizing aspect of subliminal consciousness; and William James, paying tribute to him in 1901, noted Myers's conception of "a middle region where a strange manufacture of inner romances perpetually goes on." By this account, Myers would have conceived of the mythopoeic as a function of a "middle region" of the subliminal self.¹⁰¹

This concept of an imagining unconscious concerned with creating "romances" and myths that find expression in dreams and daydreams as well as in certain forms of trance and dissociative states has never been fully pursued, but the relevance of a myth-making unconscious for occult practice is clear. The notion that hidden realms of consciousness can facilitate fully fledged acts of creative imagining is reminiscent of the Romantic unconscious, but the concept of the mythopoeic further suggests that the unconscious is capable of spinning complex webs of creation with interpretive, explanatory, and even ethical significance.

Traditionally myths have offered creative solutions to the great mysteries and dilemmas of human existence. They explore the relationship between life and death, the human and nonhuman, earthly and terrestrial, and provide answers to questions that otherwise have been or remain unanswerable. The concept of the mythopoeic therefore nods to both the fictionalizing aspects of the unconscious and its ability to stage "romances" that present a meaningful account of what in supraliminal or rational terms might be conceived as inexplicable. Furthermore the unconscious here becomes the myth maker, assuming an agency of which the conscious "I" is largely unaware. In terms of the occult this would suggest that it is the unconscious or an aspect of it that serves as creator of worlds beyond rational apprehension, but the conscious and rational "I" of the Adept which assumes the role of Lord of the Dance. If we assume the mythopoeic capabilities of the hidden regions of the mind, then advanced occult practice can be understood as an extraordinary and controlled performance of the conscious "I" in a mythos of mutual unconscious creation. By this reckoning it is the crucial alignment of rational consciousness with the apparently irrational world of the myth-creating unconscious that produces the powerful experience of the occult "real."

This might represent a supernormal achievement of heroic proportions, but it also consigns the occult world to the status of the unreal. Mythos has long stood in opposition to rational explanation and remains for the modern intellect an interpretive "romance." Although the continued relevance of myth for modern Western societies was recognized at the turn of the cen-

tury by theorists as different as Georges Sorel and Hans Vaihinger, these thinkers were not concerned with challenging the ontological status of myth. Vaihinger, for example, argued for the importance of “religious fictions” in the construction of a modern worldview but thought in terms of a consciously employed “as if” that might underwrite a new ethical and aesthetic order.¹⁰² The concept of the mythopoeic, on the other hand, privileges the role of the unconscious in the creation of “fictions”—an altogether different and, given the power of unconscious fantasy, potentially more dangerous matter. This is not to say that myths—of national or racial origins, say—do not continue to play a powerful and sometimes tragic part in world affairs, but unconscious fantasy has a claim on the real that the concept of myth conspicuously lacks. Freud’s theory of the mind stressed the powerful role of the unconscious in the shaping of individual psychic reality, and the importance of that reality for the ordering of experience. If the mythos of the occult world was the creation of a mythopoeic unconscious, and if that world was apprehended and explored by the conscious “I,” then the effect would be powerful indeed. This would be a world simultaneously determined and experienced by human consciousness—the active principle of creator and created combining to produce a new logos.

Occultists, of course, would have resisted this interpretation. They acknowledged the interiority of their experience and understood the importance of imagination for the magical enterprise, but they did not assume that the creative capability of the mind (unconscious or otherwise) was synonymous with the creator and architect of the unknown universe. Neither would they have accepted that the occult realms through which they traveled and over which they experienced a certain degree of control amounted solely to the creation of and participation in a self-conceived mythos. Occultists’ experiences led them to postulate a consciousness beyond the personal that the Adept could enter and possibly manipulate, a consciousness akin to the *Anima Mundi* of the medieval Hermetic philosophers or the Neoplatonic idea of the World Soul.

Freud had early pondered the possibility that dreams and rituals might point to archaic vestiges of tribal consciousness buried deep in the unconscious, ideas that continued to fascinate him even though he largely abandoned them as potentially threatening to the respectability of psychoanalytic theory.¹⁰³ It was Jung who picked up and developed the concept of the collective unconscious so closely allied to the “great mind and great memory” of Yeats and the fin-de-siècle occultists. It was Jung, too, who became convinced of the existence of a universal language of symbols that manifests itself, often in dreams, from the depths of the individual unconscious—just as occultists

conversely believed that “this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols.” Jung’s concept of a collective unconscious has clear and acknowledged implications for magical practice, but he was cautious about what his proposed universal symbols and archetypes might ultimately mean. Jung eschewed pronouncements on whether they suggest the existence of God, and his work points to a close identification of God with the unconscious self.

Occultists similarly had a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between God and the self and dedicated much of their work to the development of “the kingdom within.” Their conception of a verifiable occult “real,” however, forestalled interpretations of the numinous that begin and end solely with the self. Occult reality was not acknowledged to be a subjective—even universally subjective—phenomenon; nor was it seen to be a mere metaphor for the hidden and “occult” unconscious. A full elaboration of consciousness was central to practical occultism, but it was not identified with the world revealed through the magical enterprise. And simply because the self was the gateway to occult realms did not suggest to occultists that the occult domain is unreal. When Yeats said, “I believe . . . in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are, in the power of creating magical illusions, in the visions of truth in the depths of the mind,” he did not mean to imply either that the spirits are unreal or that magic is mere illusion. He was expressing the conviction that “what we have agreed to call magic” is a means of describing and accessing a reality that we can know only in the terms available to us. He was also acknowledging that this is a reality created through the power of the imagination. Nevertheless, the operative word remains *truth*. The “spirits” might be creatures of human invention, but Yeats and his fellow occultists believed in those “visions of truth [created] in the depths of the mind.”¹⁰⁴

For occultists at the fin de siècle, then, magic and the magical work was intimately bound up with the full exercise of the mind’s creative faculties, just as the occult “real” was experienced through the exploration of subjective consciousness; but occult reality was always conceived as existing in excess of the profound and sublime “resources of the self.” Occultists’ acknowledgment that in effect occult reality is created in knowable form by the fictionalizing mind serves only to signal once again the extreme modernity of the magical enterprise. It did nothing to detract from a belief in the higher truths and a verifiable occult “real” revealed in those visionary deeps. This remained, after all, enchantment, albeit in demonstrably modern mode. In the following chapter I pursue these themes and open up others through a detailed analysis of an extraordinary series of magical rites performed early in the new century by a self-styled master magician—some

would say sorcerer—and his young apprentice. But while seeking to understand this episode in all of its rich complexity, I also read it somewhat against the occult grain. The chapter takes the form of a case study while its argument is directed towards understanding the honed creative powers of the magical mind as enabling a staged dialogue with the “occult” phenomena of the personal unconscious. In a further interpretation that occultists would partially have resisted, therefore, but one with no less stunning implications, I will suggest that this Edwardian experiment in high magic constitutes a spectacular exemplar of a minutely orchestrated encounter with the occluded self.

CHAPTER SIX

✧ Aleister Crowley in the Desert ✧

In late 1909, two Englishmen, scions of the comfortable middle classes, undertook a journey to Algiers. Aleister Crowley, later to be dubbed “the wickedest man in the world,” was in his early thirties; his companion, Victor Neuburg, had only recently graduated from Cambridge. The stated purpose of the trip was pleasure. Crowley, widely traveled and an experienced mountaineer and big-game hunter, loved North Africa and had personal reasons for wanting to be out of England. Neuburg probably had little say in the matter. Junior in years, dreamy and mystical by nature, and in awe of a man whom he both loved and admired, Neuburg was inclined to acquiesce without demur in Crowley’s various projects. There was, however, another highly significant factor in Neuburg’s quiescence. He was Crowley’s chela, a novice initiate of the Magical Order of the Silver Star, which Crowley had founded two years earlier. As such, Neuburg had taken a vow of obedience to Crowley as his Master and affectionately dubbed “holy guru,” and had already learned that in much that related to his life, Crowley’s word was now law.

It was at Crowley’s instigation that the two men began to make their way, first by tram and then by foot, into the North African desert to the southwest of Algiers; and it was Crowley’s decision to perform there a series of magical ceremonies that prefigured his elaboration of the techniques of sex magic, or, as he was later to call it, Magick. In this case, the ceremonies combined the performance of advanced ritual magic with homosexual acts. It is this episode in the desert—sublime and terrifying as an experience, profound in its effects, and illuminating in what it reveals of the engagement of advanced magical practice with personal selfhood—that constitutes the focus of this chapter.

The Crowley life story is almost the stuff of Victorian melodrama: the

good man gone bad, betrayer of women and men alike, corrupter of innocence, dark angel and self-proclaimed Antichrist. Viewed differently, Crowley assumes tragic-heroic status. This was a gifted man born into privilege who scorned convention and ultimately destroyed himself in his relentless search for impossible truths. In the magical world that he made his own, the name Aleister Crowley evokes admiration, even reverence. Offshoots of Crowley's Magical Order and practitioners of his Magick are to be found throughout the Western world. Just the same—from his early days in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn to the present day—Crowley has been denounced by magicians as everything ranging from an evil genius to a magical fraud. His contemporaries excoriated him as rumors of his escapades reached a wider public through reported court cases and salacious articles in the general press.

Nevertheless, however Crowley is viewed, his magical odyssey is deeply instructive of the potentialities of the psychologized magic of the *fin de siècle*, and illustrative of its dangers. Not least, Crowley's magical practice epitomized the ease with which the high aspirations of an Order such as the Golden Dawn could metamorphose into those so-called black arts against which occultists such as Madame Blavatsky railed. At an individual level, as seems to have happened with Crowley, undisciplined psychologized magic in the hands of the ill-prepared could lead to personal disintegration. At all events, what happened in the desert might be said to have destroyed the lives of two men. It certainly crystallized the moment at which Crowley let go of what was known and could be anticipated magically, and for good or ill embraced both a lived and a magical *modus operandi* in which there are no safeguards and no guarantees.

The episode that forms the focus of this chapter marks the point at which Crowley crossed the Rubicon in a number of senses, but the experiment was not straightforwardly self-serving, as much of his magical work was to become. Nor did it represent simply the indulgence of an exoticized and outlawed sexuality. What happened in the desert was the result of a serious, if misguided, attempt to access and explore a centuries-old magical system, and it represented an intense personal investment in the pursuit of magical knowledge. In the following discussion the event itself is deconstructed with a view to presenting both a microanalysis of a magical rite performed in a specific context, and a focused discussion of the relationship between psychologized magic and the exploration of subjectivity. The chapter therefore sets out to examine the meaning and significance of a particular magical work performed in a colonial context against a backdrop of *fin-de-siècle* "decadence," while also getting at its immediate experiential dimensions.

The episode itself provides a rare glimpse of interiorized magic in the making, although that was certainly not Crowley's intention in either his subsequent veiled allusions to the performance of the rite or his documentation of its magical effects. Furthermore, in situating the discussion within the conceptual framework implied by the term *subjectivity* I am stepping outside both the magical episteme and the liberal-humanist conception of self upon which Crowley (in 1909 at least) depended. I am instead relying on a particular theoretical formulation of selfhood that underscores its contingency.¹ The poststructuralist concept of subjectivity is suggestive of a self that is both stable and unstable, knowable and unknowable, constructed and unique. The central purpose of the chapter, however, is to present an analysis of a pivotal magical experience, elucidating its complexities, and arguing for it in terms of an ultimate self-realization that exposed the limitations of a unified sense of self upon which experiential self-identity depends.

The Making of a Magician

Aleister Crowley was born in 1875 to Edward and Emily Crowley, Plymouth Brethren of the strictest kind.² He was baptized Edward Alexander, known in the family as Alick, and only later (in his ardent Celtic phase) changed his name to Aleister. The Crowley money had been made in the brewery trade, but the senior Edward Crowley had little to do with the business and lived a gentleman's existence. He was a gifted and devoted preacher, and his son adored and sought to emulate him. Conversely, and significantly, the youthful Alick had no time for his mother, whom he despised and remembered treating virtually like a servant. At the age of eight, and in accordance with the dictates of his social class, Alick was sent away to school, where he continued in a pious vein. In 1887, however, his father died, and an immediate change was wrought in the boy. He began to hate his school, and while continuing to accept the theology of the Brethren quite "simply went over to Satan's side."³

In his *Confessions* Crowley states that he could not understand the reason for this sudden identification with the forces of evil. It is possible that his claim that from the age of twelve he sought Satan's path with a passion previously reserved for the God of his father might have been a convenient authorial fiction. On the other hand, it is not difficult to speculate on the possible reasons for a switch of allegiance—the death of a father who was synonymous in the boy's mind with Christ, if not God; the fallibility of the idea of an all-powerful and just God; and so on. Crowley, perceptive and witty about the foibles of others, could apparently display an astonishing

lack of insight when it came to himself. Perhaps this is why he failed to make more of the fact that it was his mother who first referred to him as “the beast,” a name he was to make his own. It was she, possibly in the wake of an adolescent episode involving Crowley and a family maid, who “believed that I was actually Anti-christ of the Apocalypse.”⁴ Whatever the reasons, in a boyhood suffused with biblical imagery, Crowley seems to have made an early identification with Satan and a further connection between Satan and sexuality. This was ultimately to be worked out in the Magick of his adult years.

In 1895 Crowley finally overcame family opposition and went up to Cambridge University. Cambridge was a final liberation from the stultifying religious atmosphere of his home, and he gave himself over to the three proscribed joys of sex, smoking, and literature. Already adept in Latin and Greek, Crowley abandoned work for the moral science tripos and spent his time in an intensive study of English literature supplemented by French literature and the classics. It was at Cambridge that he first read Richard Burton’s *Arabian Nights* and began to acquire an extensive library, including valuable first editions. Crowley adopted a luxurious lifestyle, but he was also reading voraciously, won distinction in the game of chess, and began to write and publish verse. Like other young men of his class, he sought *amours* with working-class girls in Cambridge. He found these encounters intoxicating, but beneath the surface his attitude towards the female sex was ambivalent. Crowley later espoused liberated views on the subject of women, recognizing female sexuality and denouncing the sexual double standard (in favor of mutual sexual abandonment). There remained, however, an undercurrent of fear, resentment, and contempt. His tendency to throw himself into passionate romantic entanglements with women was paralleled by an equal facility for discarding them when his needs altered or attention wandered. This single-minded ruthlessness was a feature of his personality and affected both women and men, but it nevertheless remains the case that Crowley left behind a trail of devastation when it came to the women in his life. Alcoholism, insanity, and suicide followed in his wake, and the suggestion that he deliberately sought out “border-line [unbalanced] women” because they could better access the astral plane remains highly questionable.⁵

In his final year at Cambridge, at the age of twenty-three, Crowley met and fell in love with Jerome Pollitt.⁶ Pollitt was ten years his senior, a close friend of Aubrey Beardsley’s, and a talented female impersonator and dancer who had performed as Diane de Rougy in tribute to the actress Liane de Pougy. In spite of the cautionary tone of Crowley’s account of the affair, and his insistence that his sexual life remained intensely heterosexual, he

conceded that their relationship was “that ideal intimacy which the Greeks considered the greatest glory of manhood and the most precious prize of life.”⁷ Later he immortalized Pollitt in *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist*, also a tribute of sorts to Richard Burton’s translated work *The Perfumed Garden*.⁸ Crowley’s collection of poems are a blend of Persian mysticism and the glorification of homosexual love, written in the style of ghazals by an imaginary seventeenth-century poet. They are supposedly translated into English by an Anglo-Indian, Major Luty, helped by an anonymous “editor,” and are then discussed by an equally fictitious clergyman. The collection, however, is typically Crowley-esque: both spoof and serious, learned in its own way while designed to amuse. Beginning “As I placed the rigid pen of my thought within the inkstand of my imagination, I tasted the bliss of Allah,” the poet Abdullah El Haji, the El Qahar of the ghazals, praises the “podex” of his lover, Habib.⁹ More notable than the explicit meaning of the verses are the hidden references to Pollitt and to Crowley himself. In the closing sections of the book, the name of Herbert Charles Jerome Pollitt is spelled out in the first letter of each line, to be followed (but in reverse order) by that of Aleister Crowley.

But Crowley’s relationship with Pollitt, while intense, was not the sole source of meaning or diversion in his life. Pollitt introduced Crowley to the “decadent” movement, and in Crowley’s words made a poet out of him; but he had little sympathy with the younger man’s growing occult interests and did not share his passion for mountaineering. During the Cambridge vacations Crowley went climbing in the Alps, achieving a lone ascent of the Eiger, and began to read widely on esoteric subjects. Inspired by the apparent allusion to a Hidden Church in A. E. Waite’s *Book of Black Magic and of Pacts*, Crowley wrote to Waite requesting further information. Waite responded by recommending that Crowley read the occult classic *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary* by Councillor von Eckartshausen, which had recently been translated by Isabelle de Steiger; the book duly accompanied him on a climbing and walking holiday during the Easter vacation of 1898. Crowley discovered that Eckartshausen indeed elaborated on Waite’s theme, describing a Secret Sanctuary and a hidden community of saintly beings who possessed the keys to the mysteries of the universe. From that moment, Crowley determined to find and enter into communication with this “mysterious brotherhood”: “I longed passionately for illumination . . . for perfect purity of life, for mastery of the secret forces of nature.”¹⁰

Crowley perceived his aspirations as religious—certainly his preoccupation at the time with the origin of evil and the nature of Satan suggested they might be—but from the outset there was also the issue of power and control.

Magic, like mountaineering, was in some respects the perfect answer to the desire for “mastery” of the forces (secret or otherwise) of nature, and he now gave himself over to his magical studies. Pollitt was rapidly seen as inimical to these researches, and Crowley ended the relationship shortly after going down from Cambridge in the early summer of 1898. Crowley was later to recognize this as an “imbecile” mistake, and it remained a cause of permanent regret.

In 1898, however, he was utterly focused, “white-hot,” on his several ambitions: climbing, poetry, and the pursuit of magical knowledge. Now a wealthy young man in his own right, he was free to pursue his interests, and several meetings that year were to further them. At Easter he had met Oscar Eckenstein, one of the finest mountaineers in England and a man whom Crowley deeply admired. Eckenstein taught him a great deal about mental discipline and they went on to climb together in major expeditions. About the same time he met Gerald Kelly, a painter who was later to be elected to the Royal Academy and his future brother-in-law. Kelly, unlike Eckenstein, shared Crowley’s interest in magic, and was to travel along that path in Crowley’s company. A chance meeting that summer, however, was possibly the most auspicious. By this time Crowley had advanced to Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers’s *Kabbalah Unveiled*, and was disposed to brag about his occult knowledge. One evening in Zermatt, while taking a respite from climbing, he met and conversed with an analytical chemist named Julian L. Baker, a man who clearly knew more than Crowley about the occult. Upon their return to England, Baker introduced Crowley to George Cecil Jones, also a chemist and, like Baker, a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Crowley was subsequently introduced to MacGregor Mathers, presumably made a favorable impression, and was duly initiated on 18 November 1898 as *Frater Perdurabo* [I will endure] in the Neophyte grade of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. In spite of dismissing most of the Order’s initiates as “muddled middle-class mediocrities,” Crowley was convinced that he had found and entered “the Hidden Church of the Holy Grail.”¹¹

Crowley therefore persevered with what he considered disappointingly dull and elementary studies, and was advanced to the grade of Philosophus in May 1899. He had now reached the top grade of the First Order and fully expected to be invited to join the tantalizing Second (or Inner) Order. About this time Crowley met Allan Bennett, an honored magician in the Golden Dawn whose magical powers were considered second only to those of MacGregor Mathers.¹² Bennett approached Crowley after a Golden Dawn ceremony and accused him of dabbling in malignant forces beyond his control.

Crowley, who had indeed been secretly studying the demonic system known as Abra-Melin magic, recognized in Bennett an occult Master and invited the impoverished magician to stay with him in his comfortable London flat at 67 Chancery Lane.¹³ A period of intense magical activity now began. Crowley's flat was fitted out with two "temples" consecrated to magical acts, one white and the other black. Here Bennett, Jones, and Crowley, in spite of the latter's relatively junior status, began to experiment with advanced magic and evoke spirits in the Abra-Melin fashion. Bennett also instructed Crowley in the magical use of drugs. These activities did not find general favor with senior members of the Golden Dawn, and Crowley began to acquire an unsavory reputation as rumors of his flamboyant lifestyle, demonic magic, and homosexuality began to circulate. W. B. Yeats thought Crowley was immoral, if not mad, while Crowley was convinced that Yeats was envious of his literary and magical prowess. Nonetheless, as we saw in chapter 2, MacGregor Mathers overruled the London leadership and initiated Crowley into the Second Order in January 1900. Crowley in turn became involved in a bitter power struggle within the Golden Dawn, subsequently abandoned both the Order and MacGregor Mathers, went on to study with other teachers, and finally established his own Magical Order in 1907.

By then a great deal had happened to him. Crowley had traveled extensively, broken several climbing records with Eckenstein and established new ones, married Rose Kelly and taken her and their new daughter on a grueling trek across China, lost that same daughter to typhoid fever, and was in the process of losing Rose to alcoholism. In 1906 he had returned to the intensive Abra-Melin magic of his earlier days, resumed his experimentation with drugs, and been recognized by George Cecil Jones as a master magician. Accordingly Crowley began to work out the details of his own Magical Order, Astrum Argentinum, or Silver Star, and founded its mouthpiece, *The Equinox*, an ambitious, well-produced periodical dedicated to the serious discussion of the occult arts.

By 1907 Crowley was in search of a following and, looking to Cambridge for potential recruits, simply turned up one day in Victor Neuburg's room at Trinity. Neuburg was already a published poet, and Crowley had been attracted by the mystical leanings in his work.¹⁴ Victor Benjamin Neuburg was then in his midtwenties, not having gone up to Cambridge until 1906, when he was twenty-three and his family had finally admitted that he was not cut out for a business career. He came from a comfortable middle-class home in North London, and had been raised by his mother following the departure of his father for his native Vienna shortly after the arranged marriage. The bulk of the family money on his mother's side lay with Victor's

Uncle Edward, who financed his nephew's education and gave his mother a cottage in Sussex as a supplement to the Hove flat to which she had moved in 1903. Victor's family, however, while undoubtedly kind and generous, had little in common with a young man who rejected conventional Judaism along with all organized religion, espoused Freethought views and progressive values, and yet had experienced mystical states since childhood.¹⁵

Crowley, affluent, charming, and urbane, an erudite fellow poet who claimed to understand spiritual realities, held a magnetic appeal for Neuburg. Equally, Crowley immediately recognized in Neuburg an "altogether extraordinary capacity for Magick," and began to groom him "for the benefit of the Order, and of himself."¹⁶ Crowley thought Neuburg faddish, incurably lazy, and lacking in self-discipline, as well as inhibited and nervous. His answer to some of these shortcomings was vigorous and prolonged physical exertion, combined with a course of extreme mental discipline—important for all embryonic magicians. In the summer of 1908 Crowley took Neuburg on a long tramp across the Pyrenees and down through Spain. Neuburg managed to make it to Madrid before succumbing to illness and exhaustion, but he and Crowley subsequently traveled on to Gibraltar and made the crossing to Tangiers.

By the time Neuburg returned to Cambridge for his final year, he had to not only work for his degree in modern languages but also read his way through the comprehensive corpus of magical, philosophical, mystical, and fictional literature required of any novice in Crowley's Order of the Silver Star. In this Order a seeker first became a Student and then a Probationer before advancing to the Neophyte grade and beyond, and Neuburg seems to have been a Probationer in 1908.¹⁷ Crowley's regimen of magical training was much more demanding than that of the Golden Dawn's First Order, but he seemed fairly pleased with his pupil. For his part, Neuburg was convinced that he stood in the shadow of a Master and, like Crowley at the turn of the century, on the threshold of a Secret Brotherhood. The spring of 1909 found Neuburg cramming feverishly for his final examinations at Cambridge while attending to Crowley's demands. He obtained an adequate Third Class degree and immediately made preparations to join Crowley at Boleskine House, his Master's large residence on the shores of Loch Ness in Scotland.

Neuburg left Cambridge on 16 June 1909 and traveled to Scotland by the night train, accompanied by another Cambridge man, Kenneth Ward. Ward was going only to take up a social invitation and to borrow a pair of Crowley's skis. Whether he knew it or not, Victor Neuburg was destined for a quite different experience. Upon his arrival at Boleskine, Neuburg was in-

formed that he was to undertake a Magical Retirement—a withdrawal from the world during which, as Crowley made clear, he must make a serious attempt to access and explore the Astral Light. Accordingly, on the eighteenth of June, this young and inexperienced fledgling magician took his place in a specially prepared chamber at Boleskine and began what was to prove to be a ten-day period of isolation marked by extreme discomfort, a certain amount of suffering, and occasional glimpses of ecstatic joy. Throughout, Crowley was almost impossibly testing. He expected Neuburg to make the kind of magical progress in days that took years to achieve in the Golden Dawn, and to do this while existing in spartan conditions with little food to sustain him. The young Probationer was made to sleep naked on a bed of gorse for a week, and early in the Retirement Crowley visited the shivering Neuburg at night and scourged him with a bundle of nettles. Later, dissatisfied with his progress, Crowley gave him thirty-two strokes with a switch of gorse and drew blood. Presumably this was not the sole purpose of these nocturnal visits. The Probationer noted in his meticulous written record that Crowley “is apparently a homo-sexual [sic] sadist. . . . He performed the ceremony with obvious satisfaction.”¹⁸ Gorse has strong prickles and nettles sting, but the young man had taken a holy vow of obedience to his magical Master. It is small wonder that Neuburg attributed an “*emissio seminer*” to anxiety.

Crowley’s attitude was clearly not that of a disinterested teacher. It also represented part of a complex and ritualized playing out of elements of his personal relationship with Neuburg. He chastised the Probationer, but in terms that related to the man. Crowley afterwards expressed the view that there was a “fundamental moral deficiency in his character,” and “a strain of racial congenital cowardice too deeply seated for eradication.”¹⁹ At the time he continually harped upon his student’s supposed “racial,” that is, Jewish, traits, and Neuburg found the personal abuse almost intolerable. He went through periods of rebellion, but in awe of Crowley, bound to him emotionally, and cognizant of his vow, Neuburg always repented of his outbursts. The racial slurs and personal insults continued. Meanwhile, however, Neuburg began to have some magical success. Prolonged periods of yoga and meditation began to facilitate changed states of consciousness, and these in turn gave way to vivid experiences on the astral planes. Moments of supreme spiritual insight, of intense and rapturous identification with the cosmic “Mind,” were equaled by episodes of horrifying despair. But Neuburg emerged from the storm to find a sense of peace and harmony, and seemed to find within himself some kind of “center.” He understood that, at some level, this sense of center accorded with the magician’s will, the essential fo-

cal point for all magical activity. Crowley approved the insight, commenting that this approached a description of initiated consciousness. In Neuburg's account of his Retirement, dated 29 June 1909, he thanked his Most Holy Guru and, fittingly, both praised and blamed him. Crowley then advanced his Probationer to the grade of Neophyte.

North Africa

Crowley and Neuburg traveled to London at the beginning of July, and there set about bringing out the second issue of the *Equinox*. But there was more than the production of his occult periodical on Crowley's mind. His divorce proceedings were coming to a head. Crowley claimed that divorce was inevitable because Rose refused to seek treatment for her alcoholism (she was later incarcerated, suffering from alcoholic dementia), but that he had done the gentlemanly thing by providing his wife with evidence of adultery so that she could appear as the plaintiff. Nevertheless, Crowley was anxious to be out of the country by the autumn of 1909 as the trial was pending. He decided upon North Africa, and maintained that he had no specific magical purpose in mind when he set out on the trip. He loved that region and simply wanted to roam at will. Accordingly, and accompanied by "Frater Omnia Vincam, a neophyte of the A . . . A . . . disguised as Victor Neuburg," Crowley left England and duly arrived in Algiers on 17 November.²⁰ Here he undoubtedly evinced the unmistakable subtly superior air of the English gentleman abroad.

On arrival, Crowley's attitude toward colonial French officialdom was one of polite disdain. He chose to ignore warnings that an unaccompanied trip through the desert could be dangerous. Instead, confident and at ease, every inch the seasoned traveler, he immediately set about buying the necessary provisions for a journey. Crowley claimed to have a basic grasp of Arabic and understood a fair amount about Muslim culture, but was concerned that the physically slight Victor Neuburg with his "hangdog look" would undermine his credibility. His remedy was surprising. On Crowley's insistence Neuburg's head was shaved, leaving only two tufts at the temples that were "twisted up into horns." Crowley laughingly, but tellingly, comments that his chela was thus transformed into "a demon that I had tamed and trained to serve me as a familiar spirit. This greatly enhanced my eminence."²¹

The two men then took the tram to Arba, and set out on a tramp through the desert. Crowley and Neuburg reached Aumale on 21 November after spending two nights sleeping under the stars. Here Crowley had the sudden insight that he must renew a magical undertaking begun in Mexico nine

years earlier. Although he denied premeditation, Crowley had brought with him various magical accoutrements, including a vermilion wooden cross set with a large golden topaz. The magical operation that he had in mind relied on a complex magical system developed by John Dee, the eminent Elizabethan mathematician and astrologer, and his clairvoyant, Edward Kelley. Dee and Kelley were well versed in practical Cabala, and experimented with the angel magic of the Renaissance magician Henry Cornelius Agrippa. Agrippa had elaborated a system of numerical and alphabetical tables for the summoning of angels, and it was within this framework that the two Elizabethans worked. John Dee used Kelley's gifts as an expert scryer, one who could "travel" in the many realms of spirit existence, to vicariously enter into conversation with the angels in order to tempt from them the secrets of the universe. Dee asked his questions through Kelley and duly recorded the results. During their lengthy séances, Kelley would "Skry in the Spirit Vision" using a "shew-stone" in much the same way as a seer might use a crystal ball. It was Kelley who saw the angel in the stone and communicated its message to Dee. If the instruction concerned a magical invocation or Call, the angel dictated it in reverse, as it was considered too powerful to simply replicate. In 1583 the angels began to give their communications in an "Angelic Secret Language" known as Enochian, and the information was recorded in a complex grid form. Over time, Dee built up an entire cosmology of angels and demons and sketched out thirty Aethyrs (or Aires)—realms of otherworldly existence.²²

This schema, probably reworked by MacGregor Mathers, had been integrated into the teachings of the Order of the Golden Dawn. Although he had been denied entry to the Second Order, Crowley had studied with other senior Golden Dawn Adepts, most notably Allan Bennett, and was familiar with Dee's system. But whereas Golden Dawn initiates were set to study Dee's so-called Enochian system as a scholarly exercise, Crowley was prepared to test its efficacy. He had made a faithful copy of Dee's nineteen Calls, or Keys, which called up powerful occult forces, and had experimented with the nineteenth Call in Mexico. Now, in Aumale, he felt impelled to resume this magical operation. Crowley considered himself a master of Astral Travel, and was in the process of teaching its necessary techniques and procedures to Neuburg. He felt that the conditions were perfect for undertaking a journey through John Dee's Aethyrs.

Crowley's technique was simple. He would select a secluded spot and recite the appropriate Call—the ritual incantation that would give him access to the relevant Aethyr. After satisfying himself that the invoked forces were present, Crowley would take up his magical shew-stone, in this case the large

golden topaz, and “Skry in the Spirit Vision” much as Kelley had done centuries before. He made “the topaz play a part not unlike that of the looking-glass in the case of *Alice*.”²³ By making the relevant Call and concentrating on the topaz, Crowley could enter the Aethyr. He was clear about what this meant: “When I say I was in any Aethyr, I simply mean in the state characteristic of, and peculiar to, its nature.”²⁴ In other words, Crowley recognized that this was a similar experience to that of Astral Travel; it was conducted within his own mind. Having accessed the Aethyr, he would describe his experiences to Neuburg, who would write them down. It is noteworthy that, typically, Crowley adapted the procedure to suit himself. Unlike Dee, he, the master magician, would be his own scribe. Victor Neuburg, whom Crowley recognized as a gifted clairvoyant, was to be merely the scribe.

As the two men made their way through the desert, Crowley increasingly fell under the spell of his experiences in Dee’s Aethyrs. He encountered celestial beings, both terrible and beautiful, who divulged in richly symbolic language something of the realms in which they dwelt. Crowley understood much of the symbolism, and began to realize that the Calls did indeed give the scribe access to an intricate but cogent and coherent universal system of other worlds and beings. He was satisfied that, whereas he saw visions and heard voices, he was not the autonomous author of his experiences: “I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears the truth. . . . These visions thus crystallized in dramatic form the theoretical conclusion which my studies of comparative religion had led me to adumbrate.”²⁵

Crowley fully intended the Calls to be an impersonal exploration of the Aethyrs, and was convinced that he was being shown the “shining simplicity” of cosmic truths. But he gradually became aware that he was personally implicated at another level. The magical work was working on him. As the Calls proceeded, Crowley began increasingly to feel something very akin to fear. It was as though, he says, a hand was holding his heart while a whispering breath enveloped him in words both awful and enchanting. In a gender reversal that was to typify much of this magical experience, Crowley reveals that he “began to feel—well, not exactly frightened; it was the subtle trembling of a maiden before the bridegroom.”²⁶ In order to fortify himself against growing feelings of awe and dread, he began to recite the Qur’an as he marched across the desert. The great stretches of empty landscape, hot by day and icy at night, and continuous intoning of magical and religious formulae, combined to effect a state of almost overwhelming spiritual intensity.

A little over two weeks after arriving in Algiers, Crowley and Neuburg reached Bou Saada. This isolated haven in the desert, with its palm trees,

gardens, and orchards, was where the desert road ran out. Bou Saada gave the impression of a last link with civilization. Some distance from the town was a mountain, Mount Da'leh Addin. It was here that Crowley, acting on instructions from previous angelic interlocutors, made the appropriate Call and attempted to enter the fourteenth Aethyr. He encountered a thick black veil that, try as he might, he could not penetrate. All the while, a voice spoke of Crowley as one about to enter "the Kingdom of the Grave."²⁷ As he struggled with the blackness a great earthquake rent the veil and Crowley saw "an all-glorious Angel" standing in front of him with his arms outstretched and head thrown back. The angel had a star upon his forehead, but he was surrounded with blackness "and the crying of beasts." The angel instructed Crowley to withdraw, the mystery of the fourteenth Aethyr being so "great and terrible" it cannot be revealed "in sight of the sun."²⁸ Shaken, Crowley prepared to return to Bou Saada. As he did so, "Suddenly came the command to perform a magical ceremony on the summit" of the mountain. Whatever form the "command" took, Crowley experienced it as absolute. He and Neuburg responded by building a great circle with loose rocks. They inscribed the circle with magical words of power, "erected an alter" in its midst, and there, in Crowley's words: "I sacrificed myself. The fire of the all-seeing sun smote down upon the alter, consuming every particle of my personality."²⁹

Crowley says simply in his *Confessions* that what took place amounted to a final tearing away of "certain conceptions of conduct which, while perfectly proper from the standpoint of my human nature," he had regarded as "impertinent to initiation."³⁰ What happened in prosaic terms was that Crowley was sodomized by Neuburg in a homosexual rite offered to the god Pan. Pan, the man-goat, had a particular significance for the two men. Not only did Crowley revere him as the diabolical god of lust and magic, but Neuburg literally had what acquaintances described as an elfin and "faun-like" appearance.³¹ It is likely that what happened on Mount Da'leh Addin was a classic invocation; the young chela, in accordance with accepted magical technique, probably "called down," or invoked, the god Pan. A successful invocation would result in the neophyte's becoming "inflamed" by the power of the god. If this is what happened during the ceremony on the mountain, Neuburg, in his magical capacity, would momentarily identify with all that the man-goat god represented. Put simply, Neuburg with his tufted "horns" would become Pan—the "faun-like" yet savage lover of Crowley's psychosexual world. This may well have been the first time that Crowley (and certainly Neuburg) had performed a magical homosexual act, although Crowley quickly came to believe that sex magic was an unrivaled means to great

power. Conversely, the image of Pan was to haunt Victor Neuburg for the rest of his life. It inspired some of his best early poetry, but later filled him with dread. The experience was overwhelming for both men, but it temporarily devastated Crowley. His summation was brief. "There was an animal in the wilderness," he writes, "but it was not I."³²

Crowley remembered nothing of his return to Bou Saada. As he slowly came to himself, however, he knew that he was changed.

I knew who I was and all the events of my life; but I no longer made myself the centre of their sphere. . . . I did not exist. . . . All things were alike as shadows sweeping across the still surface of a lake—their images had no meaning for the water, no power to stir its silence.³³

Crowley felt that he had ceremonially crossed the Abyss—a term reminiscent of Nietzsche (whom Crowley greatly admired), but denoting the last terrible journey that a magician must make before he could justifiably lay claim to the highest levels of Adeptship. Master of the Temple, a grade of enlightened initiation achieved in Crowley's own Magical Order only after crossing the Abyss, meant renunciation of all that life meant. The Order of the Golden Dawn taught that such awareness could not be accessed this side of death, and Crowley affirmed this in his own way. The Angel of the fourteenth Aethyr had warned him that the Master of the Temple is condemned to darkness. Crowley in turn taught that becoming a Master of the Temple implied not simply symbolic death and rebirth, a concept familiar to all magical initiates, but the annihilation of the personal self. The Abyss, then, was closely associated with the death of the individual—although not necessarily on the physical level.

A few days later, Crowley, who in the aftermath of the "sacrifice" on Mount Da'leh Addin had already acknowledged that at one level "I did not exist," prepared formally to undergo the Abyss ordeal. He understood that he would do so when he entered John Dee's tenth Aethyr, and knew that while there he must meet and defeat the terrible "Choronzon, the mighty devil that inhabiteth the outermost Abyss."³⁴ He also knew that he could do so only as *Perdurabo*, a magical Adept, and that it was paramount that he applied the lesson of the fourteenth Aethyr: no shred of ego must remain if he was to survive the experience unscathed. Success depended on Crowley's ability to master Choronzon through the dominating power of the magical will. The complex techniques, rituals, and paraphernalia of magical practice are the means by which a magician develops and "inflames" his will, the single most important attribute of a magician. Crowley understood

that Choronzon's power could be bound and brought under control only through the silent but relentless application of the magical will, and that this was critical for a successful crossing of the Abyss. Failure to force Choronzon into submission would enslave the magician to him, corrupting every subsequent undertaking and bringing disaster in its wake. Given this, and the warnings he had received in the previous Aethyrs, Crowley changed his magical procedure.

On 6 December 1909, Crowley and Neuburg left Bou Saada and went far out into the desert until they found a suitable valley in the dunes. Here they traced a circle in the sand, inscribing it with the various sacred names of God. A triangle was then traced nearby, its perimeters likewise inscribed with divine names and also with that of Choronzon. This was correct magical practice. The magic circle provided protection for the magician; the Triangle of Art was intended to contain any visible manifestation of the forces "called up" or evoked by *Perdurabo*. The process of evocation was designed to produce a physical materialization of, in this case, the demonic inhabitant of the Abyss. Three pigeons were sacrificed and their blood placed at the three corners of the triangle; Crowley took particular care that it remained within the confines of the figure so that it would facilitate and help sustain any physical manifestation. At this point Neuburg entered the circle. He was armed with a magic dagger, and had strict instructions to use it if anything—even anything that looked like Crowley—attempted to break into the circle. At Crowley's instigation, Neuburg swore an oath to defend its inviolability with his life. Crowley, dressed in his ceremonial black robe, then made an astonishing departure from accepted ritual practice. Instead of joining his chela in the relative safety of the circle, he entered the Triangle of Art. While Neuburg performed the Banishing Rituals of the Pentagram and Hexagram, a procedure designed to protect him, Crowley made the Call of the tenth Aethyr.³⁵

The mighty Choronzon announced himself from within the shew-stone with a great cry, "*Zazas, Zazas, Nasatanada Zazas*":

I am I. . . . From me come leprosy and pox and plague and cancer and cholera and the falling sickness. Ah! I will reach up to the knees of the Most High, and tear his phallus with my teeth, and I will bray his testicles in a mortar, and make poison thereof, to slay the sons of men.³⁶

Crowley probably uttered these words. Thereafter, however, as far as Neuburg could tell, Crowley fell silent; he remained seated in the triangle in the sand, robed and hooded, deeply withdrawn, and "did not move or speak

during the ceremony.”³⁷ It was Neuburg who both heard and saw. Unlike the previous Calls, when he had acted merely as scribe, Neuburg now beheld not Crowley seated within the triangle, but all that Crowley conjured. Before him appeared Choronzon in the guise of a beautiful woman whom he had known and loved in Paris, and she tried to lure him from the circle. She was followed by a holy man and a serpent.

Slowly the demon in his various manifestations managed to engage the inexperienced Neuburg in discussion, and then proceeded to mock him: had he not, “O talkative One,” been instructed to hold no converse with the mighty Choronzon? Undoubtedly Neuburg had been so instructed by Crowley, but in the heat of the moment he forgot himself. During the intense debate that ensued, with Victor Neuburg scribbling furiously so as to record every detail, Choronzon began stealthily to erase the protective edges of the circle in the sand. Suddenly, Choronzon sprang from the triangle into the circle and wrestled Neuburg to the ground. The scribe found himself struggling with a demon in the shape of “a naked savage,” a strong man who tried to tear out his throat with “froth-covered fangs.” Neuburg, invoking the magical names of God, struck out with his dagger and finally forced the writhing figure back into the triangle. The chela repaired the circle, and Choronzon resumed his different manifestations and ravings. Cajoling, tempting, decrying, pleading, he continued to debate and attempt to undermine the scribe. Finally, the manifestations began to fade. The triangle emptied.³⁸

Neuburg now became aware of Crowley, who was sitting alone in the triangle. He watched as Crowley wrote the name BABALON, signifying the defeat of Choronzon, in the sand with his Holy Ring.³⁹ The ceremony was concluded; it had lasted over two hours. The two men lit a great fire of purification, and obliterated the circle and the triangle. They had undergone a terrible ordeal. Crowley states that he had “astrally identified” himself with Choronzon throughout, and had “experienced each anguish, each rage, each despair, each insane outburst.”⁴⁰ Neuburg, however, had held forbidden converse with the Dweller of the Abyss. Both men now felt that they understood the nature of the Abyss. It represented Dispersion: a terrifying chaos in which there was no center and no controlling consciousness. Its fearsome Dweller was not an individual but the personification of a magnitude of malignant forces made manifest through the massed energy of the evoking magician. But to experience these forces at the most immediate and profoundly personal level, and to believe, as Neuburg did, that he had been involved in a fight to the death with them, was shattering. As Crowley remarked, “I hardly know how we ever got back to Bou Saada.”⁴¹

Over the next two weeks Crowley and Neuburg continued the Calls as

they made their way towards Biskra, a desert journey of over a hundred miles. Some of Crowley's experiences in the Aethyrs were lyrical hymns of beauty and ecstasy, but others seemed full of foreboding—suggesting that he had stumbled into a world for which he was not yet prepared. By the time they reached Biskra on 16 December, Crowley knew that he was perilously close to the absolute limit of his powers. Four days later he concluded the final Call. The magical work was finished. The two men were utterly exhausted, but not by the hardships of the physical journey, which Crowley, at least, found delightful. It was the magical experience that had taken its toll. Those who knew them said that Neuburg “bore the marks of this magical adventure to the grave,” and that Crowley, shattered psychologically, never recovered from the ordeal.⁴² The two men recuperated in Biskra before returning to Algiers. They sailed for England on the last day of December 1909.

The Soul of the Desert

Although Crowley was casual about the *mise-en-scène* of the Calls, it is unlikely that the setting for this magical undertaking was mere accident. “Arabia” and the desert held a special significance for him. Crowley reveled in Arab, or, more specifically, Bedouin, culture. After a long day's tramp, he claimed to enjoy nothing more than to join the men of a remote village to while away the night drinking coffee and smoking tobacco or “kif” (hashish). He was already familiar with the effects of a “huqqa . . . laden with maddening cannabis,” and felt emancipated by the desert and its society.⁴³ Crowley acknowledged that while his spiritual self was at home in China, his “heart and hand are pledged to the Arab.”⁴⁴ When he spoke of “the Arab,” however, his abiding identification was with what he took to be the spirit of desert culture—the strong ties that bound man to man, and an existence pared down to the aestheticized essentials. A romanticized ethos of masculinity was one of the aspects of “Arabia” that had particular resonance for him.

A great deal has been written about the European fascination with the desert, the romanticization of the Bedouin, and the creation in travel literature and elsewhere of a particular mythic “Orient.”⁴⁵ Crowley was not immune to these fictions. While his firsthand experience of the desert was powerful and direct, his affinity with “the Arab” had a different basis. When he assumed that he had intuitively penetrated the heart of the desert Arab, that he understood at an unspoken level the profound effect on the human spirit of living in unmediated dialogue with what he called the eight genii of

the desert, it was because he had read so avidly in the “Arabia Deserta” literature.⁴⁶ And if there is a subtext for Crowley’s North African adventure—indeed, for all his travels—it was the life and work of the Victorian adventurer and explorer Richard Burton. Burton represented the kind of man Crowley most wished to be—strong, courageous, intrepid, but also a learned scholar-poet, and a man who jibed at conventional restraints. His dark, scarred face and satanic aura seemed to suggest knowledge and powers beyond the accepted and acceptable, his exploits in Africa and the Near East were legendary, and his translations of Italian, Latin, Arabic, and Sanskrit texts had introduced a Victorian readership to European and “oriental” folklore and erotica.⁴⁷ A man of astounding breadth and capabilities, Burton was without doubt a model for Crowley. When he undertook his lengthy travels in remote places, Crowley felt that he was “treading, though reverently and afar off, in the footsteps of my boyhood’s hero, Richard Francis Burton.” He was one of three men to whom Crowley dedicated his *Confessions*: “the perfect pioneer of spiritual and physical adventure.”⁴⁸

Crowley aspired to the kind of cultural mastery exhibited in Burton’s famous 1853 “pilgrimage” to Mecca when the explorer, perfectly disguised as a Muslim, had penetrated to the heart of a holy city denied to Europeans. Crowley’s flamboyant use of a star sapphire ring during his North African travels with Neuburg was based on Burton’s information that the stone was venerated by Muslims. According to Crowley, he put a stop to a coffee-shop brawl by calmly walking into the scrimmage and inscribing magical figures in the air with the ring while intoning a chapter from the Qur’an: “The fuss stopped instantly, and a few minutes later the original parties to the dispute came to me and begged me to decide between them, for they saw that I was a saint.”⁴⁹ Although Crowley’s account is self-parodying, he was, like Burton, implicated in the imperialist project. Both men rejected the stifling restrictions of Victorian society, and in different ways sought to dissociate themselves from bourgeois notions of sober, restrained, industrious manhood. Nevertheless, while genuinely revering Arab culture and its peoples, they equally epitomized that unreflective assumption of superiority and desire for mastery that was integral to imperialist endeavors.⁵⁰ These issues, however, are complex. In the case of Burton and Crowley, neither a sense of superiority nor the drive for mastery was necessarily equated with the ruthless repression of the feminine that (following Freud) is often associated with accounts of modern masculine subjectivity. If the two men conformed in certain respects to the classic profile of the imperialist, they were also drawn to a culture that could apparently accommodate the expression of the feminine as an intrinsic part of virile masculinity.

Imperialism invariably implies a degree of feminization, but Crowley, influenced by Burton, viewed Arab culture as a positive and irresistible blend of the masculine and feminine. “El Islam,” Richard Burton had noted, “seems purposely to have loosened the ties between the sexes in order to strengthen the bonds which connect man and man.”⁵¹ This is suggestive of both the profoundly masculinist society of Crowley’s imagination and its mirror image, and Burton was in part responsible for this particular characterization of the East. Early in his army career Burton had been asked to investigate the homosexual brothels in Karachi, a mainly Muslim settlement occupied by the British since 1839, because it was feared that they were corrupting British soldiers. Burton’s report was so detailed that it subsequently gave rise to rumors about his own sexual proclivities, which he never fully lived down.⁵² He had long been fascinated by “oriental” erotica when, late in life, he committed his considerable erudition to paper with the publication of his studies of Eastern pederasty. Through these and other writings, “Arabia” had become synonymous in the European imagination with homosexuality.⁵³

It is not insignificant that in the year in which Crowley and Neuburg tramped across the desert, T. E. Lawrence—later to be immortalized as Lawrence of Arabia—was undertaking a walking tour in the Middle East, and that rumors concerning Lawrence’s homosexuality were linked with his early close relationship with an Arab assistant. It is also relevant that Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas had anticipated Crowley’s discovery of Algeria, and enjoyed all that Algiers had to offer. Indeed, Wilde had arranged for a tremulous André Gide to spend the night with a young male Arab in that city, so confirming for Gide his own sexual identity.⁵⁴ For these European men, an apparent acceptance of *le vice contra nature* was part of the lure of the Arab world. Although it went far deeper than that for Crowley, as for Lawrence, the desert signified the expression—often the honorable expression—of a heterodox male sexuality.

Yet Crowley’s love of the desert, and its relationship to expressive sexuality, was more complex than this. In “The Soul of the Desert,” published in 1914, he writes a lyrical paean to the mystical power of this “wilderness of sand.”⁵⁵ The desert, he says, has the power to strip a man of everything that he has and is until he must finally stand naked in the face of the elements. So, he writes, “at last the Ego is found alone, unmasked, conscious of itself and of no other thing.”⁵⁶ There is simply the unreflective consciousness of one who tramps through the dunes. It is this, an uncomplicated acknowledgment of what *is*, that makes it possible to love in the desert “as it is utterly impossible to do in any other conditions.”⁵⁷ Here, a shared glance, a chosen

place in the sand, and “life thrills in sleepy unison; all, all in silence, not names or vows exchanged, but with clean will an act accomplished. . . . Love itself becomes simple as the rest of life.”⁵⁸ This simple love, an effect of the crystallized intensity of desert existence, is a prelude to

the bodily ecstasy of dissolution, the pang of bodily death, wherein the Ego for a moment that is an aeon loses the fatal consciousness of itself, and becoming one with that of another, foreshadows to itself that greater sacrament of death, when “the spirit returns to God that gave it.”⁵⁹

But Crowley goes further. In “The Soul of the Desert,” “the wilderness of sand” becomes the figurative realization of an eroticized spirituality. It is equated with an ecstatic experience far outstripping an orgasmic loss of sense of self—the “little death” of sexual climax. The desert, with its wastes of endless sand, inescapable solitude, and implacable indifference to the miserable struggles of humanity, is parent to the quintessential mystical experience: the dissolution of “the soul . . . into the abounding bliss of God.” And, for Crowley, this “dissolution” is synonymous with what he calls here “the annihilation of the Self in Pan.” The coded reference to Crowley’s relationship with Neuburg, and the sacrificial ceremony undertaken with him on the summit of Da’leh Addin in 1909, is clear. In a marked eroticization of the supremely spiritual, Crowley writes: “Such must be the climax of any [magical] retirement to the desert.”⁶⁰

“It was like Jekyll and Hyde”

Crowley used *Self*, *Ego*, and *Soul* as interrelated if not synonymous terms. Speaking of the “sacrifice” on Mount Da’leh Addin, he could say that every particle of his “personality” was consumed; elsewhere, he talks of “the annihilation of the Self in Pan.” Similarly, he writes of that moment of crisis in the desert “when it becomes necessary to penetrate beneath the shadow-show to the secret sanctuary of the soul”; and, of that same moment, that “at last the Ego is found alone, unmasked, conscious of itself and of no other thing.”⁶¹ It was never Crowley’s concern to provide a precise ontology of human identity, and he drew on an eclectic metaphysics when he alluded to the nature of being. His commentaries, however, suggest that he predicated his experiential sense of self on both an esoteric and a liberal-humanist understanding of a unique individual essence. He understood a good deal about the “shadow-show” of personality pyrotechnics that exemplified the man Aleister Crowley, but adhered to the notion of a “secret sanctuary of

the soul” as a kind of occult shrine of the ultimate “Self.” The “moment of crisis in the desert” signifies a stripping away of the layers of the “personality”—a crucial unmasking in preparation for the unveiling of this final “Self.”

Crowley was a man who knew all about masks; he delighted in playing with identity. At Cambridge he had become an ardent Jacobite, changing his name from Alexander to Aleister (a misspelling of its Gaelic equivalent), and afterwards adopted the spurious persona of Lord Boleskine, a Highland laird. Shortly after his initiation into the Golden Dawn, he had taken a flat in London under the name of Count Vladimir Svareff and enjoyed posing as a young Russian nobleman. In Cairo in 1904 Crowley decided to pass himself off as a Persian prince, and became Prince Chioa Khan. While these experiments were undertaken in a spirit of fun and adventure, they were also undoubtedly due to a certain restiveness on Crowley’s part over his given position in life. His wealth and education ensured his social acceptability, but his strict Puritanical background and family ties to trade were far removed from his romantic fantasies of aristocratic lineage and lifestyle. Crowley longed to be other than a brewer’s son. His adopted identities, however, were never anything more than a rich man’s indulgent fictions. There is no sense, for example, that he lived as Chioa Khan in the same way that both Richard Burton and T. E. Lawrence lived as Arabs. Indeed, this was never his intention. Crowley’s impersonation of a Persian prince was simply the occasion for a piece of exotic showmanship; an opportunity to dress up in a series of gorgeous silk robes and swagger about the streets of Cairo. There is no sense in which he experienced himself as *traumatically* “divided.” He did not have Burton’s abiding conviction that he was two men, or Lawrence’s painful awareness of psychic dissonance in which he literally embodied the dislocation identified in theoretical discussions of masquerade.⁶² Crowley’s assumption of different identities was, as he readily acknowledged, mere playacting. He did not experience his various dramatis personae as “selves.”

This was not the case with his magical identity. Crowley *was* Perdurabo, and it was as a master magician that he traveled through the timeless Aethyrs of a sixteenth-century magus. The magical self was part of Crowley’s concept of selfhood, but in a specific sense. From the time of his initiation into the Golden Dawn, Crowley, like other initiates, gained an understanding of magic as bound up in complex and interrelated ways with the person of the magician and the operation of the magical will. By 1900 he was experimenting with the conscious movement between two separate selves, and had perfected a practice that owed much, he says, to Robert Louis Stevenson:

As a member of the Second Order [of the Golden Dawn], I wore a certain jewelled ornament of gold upon my heart. I arranged that when I had it on, I was to permit no thought, word or action, save such as pertained directly to my magical aspirations. When I took it off I was, on the contrary, to permit no such things; I was to be utterly uninitiate. It was like Jekyll and Hyde, but with the two personalities balanced and complete in themselves.⁶³

Crowley's reference to Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is instructive. This highly popular novel, published in 1886, features a respectable doctor who uses his specialized knowledge to create a second self, which manifests in his body through a process of startling transformation. The loathsome Mr. Hyde—"the beast Hyde"—is the literal embodiment of everything his creator is not; he is the shadow side of the late-Victorian bourgeois male. Hyde understands nothing of sober self-restraint, and freely indulges his craving for unspecified "secret pleasures." The implication that Hyde's nocturnal escapades were sexual as well as violent was clear in the sensational London stage adaptation, which opened in August 1888; W. T. Stead's *Pall Mall Gazette* was quick to link the play with the gruesome Jack the Ripper murders of five prostitutes in London's East End that autumn. In the furor that followed, the play was closed.⁶⁴

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde articulates specific anxieties about bourgeois masculinity. By the 1880s significant cracks had appeared in the conventional formulation of the decent, disciplined, God-fearing gentleman as the epitome of middle-class male respectability. Late-Victorian concerns over prostitution, pornography, venereal disease, the moral welfare of children, and the safety of respectable women on city streets centered on a series of public campaigns that promoted the representation of male sexuality as predatory and dangerous.⁶⁵ In particular, the metaphor of the "beast," precisely the term used by his mother to disparage the adolescent Crowley, was mobilized during this period to refer to the egotistic and lustful attributes of an intemperate "lower self."⁶⁶ In the rhetoric of these campaigns, married and single men were equally a source of concern. Indeed, although the marriage bed and supposedly redemptive qualities of pure Victorian womanhood had traditionally been seen as a bulwark against male profligacy, there was a growing sense that marriage merely exposed women to licensed sexual exploitation. An undifferentiated "male lust" accounted for the seemingly endemic spread of "vice," and social purity groups and vigilance committees mobilized throughout the country to combat its influence. Although Stevenson sought to deny any implicit reference to sexuality in his novel, the masculine world it depicts was widely regarded as the setting for a graphic

representation of the debased Hyde in Everyman—the vile and murderous debaucher lurking beneath the surface of urbane gentility. The 1888 play made explicit the target of the villain's lusts.

But *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is also centrally concerned with the idea of the divided self, and is equally a refiguring of the concept of dual personality, which played upon a fin-de-siècle fascination with duality, fragmentation, and disintegration. In the novel, Dr. Jekyll can only speak of his other self, his “devil,” via the disclaimer “he” (“He, I say—I cannot say, I”), while the potion with the power to turn a Jekyll into a Hyde is represented as an assault on “the very fortress of identity.”⁶⁷ The novel’s implied challenge to the notion of a unified self as the single source of identity was echoed elsewhere as the century drew to a close, and this was perhaps particularly marked in contemporary discussion of the human mind. Indeed, there is some indication that Stevenson was familiar with developments in European psychology, and that he had been “deeply impressed” by a “scientific” paper he had read in French on “sub-consciousness.”⁶⁸ As we have seen, advanced occultists were also cognizant of the work of European psychologists and familiar with the idea of “subconsciousness.” Nevertheless, when occultists spoke of a second magical or astral self they were referring to the conscious and controlled development of a powerful and effective second self that would explore the spheres beyond conscious awareness. This second self was not the dissociated personality of spiritualist mediumship or psychological disorder. When Crowley suggested that the existence of his two selves, the initiate and “uninitiate” personalities, was somehow similar to the divided self of Dr. Jekyll, he was simply acknowledging the relevance of the novel’s central theme to magical practice. The key difference for Crowley between himself and Dr. Jekyll lay in the fact that Crowley’s “two personalities [are] balanced and complete in themselves.” He would also have wished to argue that Perdurabo was no monster. He was an initiated magical self, and in no way represented a personal crisis of identity. It is in a magical sense that Crowley acknowledged not one self but (over time) many. And because of his magical training, Crowley did not conceive of this as a *problematic* splitting.

As the new century unfolded, Crowley began to combine the conceptual lexicon of magic with insights gleaned from developments in the study of the mind. It seems likely that he had discovered Freud by the time he wrote “The Soul of the Desert” in 1914, in which he refers, as we have seen, to the unmasking of the “Ego.” Although this is not conclusive evidence that he understood “Ego” in the strictly Freudian sense—the term was adopted in translations of Freud but had been in use for almost a century to connote the conscious subject and was common currency among occultists—it is the

case that by 1914 Freud's ideas had been circulating in England for several years. At any rate, in "The Soul of the Desert," Crowley clearly conceptualizes the Ego as the "I" (Freud's original "das Ich"), which speaks in the name of Aleister Crowley and suggests that this "I" is the tip of the iceberg. By the 1920s, Crowley was using key psychoanalytic concepts and acknowledging that Freudian theory offers confirmation of some of the critical insights of magical practice. Psychoanalysis in no way undermined the credibility of magical practice for Crowley or other similarly minded magicians. It merely presents a different narrative of the heroic voyager and the landscape through which he or she travels.⁶⁹ Crowley made it plain that he approved of Freud's theorizing of the relationship between the conscious and unconscious, but emphasized that Freud had arrived at his conclusions somewhat late in the day. According to Crowley, the father of psychoanalysis was simply articulating what magicians had known for centuries.⁷⁰

Erasing the Line in the Sand

But it was magical practice, not psychoanalytic theory, that taught Crowley that the apparent coherence of human selfhood is illusory. Although he held to the idea of a hidden essential "Self," a unique core at the heart of the man, magic taught him that the "I" of Aleister Crowley was only one possible self among many. The most terrible lesson that Crowley had to learn, however, and he learned it in the desert, was that it is precisely this "I"—that which apparently secures our place in the worldly order of things—that must undergo dissolution in the ordeal of the Abyss. Crowley understood the Abyss to be a great gulf fixed between "intelligible intuition" and "the intellect." Other commentators see it as "an imaginary gulf" between the real and ideal, or "the gulf existing between individual and cosmic consciousness."⁷¹ As in all magical practice, however, the Abyss can manifest in physical form, the plastic representation of its assumed qualities. But whether understood in symbolic or literal terms, crossing the Abyss involves the final and irrevocable abandonment of the "I" along with its accompanying claim to sole rational authority.

The preamble to confronting the Abyss, and its demonic guardian, Choronzon, is a mental crisis, a "terrible pinnacle of the mind"; to cross the Abyss, "one must abandon utterly and for ever all that one has and is." As Crowley recognized, this is represented in the language of mysticism "as the complete surrender of the self to God"—mystical death as the prerequisite for mystical union. In secular terms, it is "the silencing of the human intellect."⁷² Crowley, schooled in the magical tradition, conceptualized both

Choronzon and the Abyss as having an external reality, and he made no subsequent attempt to amend this view. But in psychoanalytic terms, terms which Crowley was later to embrace, it can be said that Choronzon is equally a manifestation of the dark, repressed components of the psyche. In this reading, Choronzon's great resistant cry, "I am I," is simultaneously the magician's last cry of horror and terror as he plunges headlong into the Abyss, and the emergent voice of the unknown and unpatrolled unconscious. Characterized by Disintegration, Dispersion, and Chaos, qualities suggestive of the fracturing experience of modernity, the Abyss is both symbolic and real. It is emblematic of breakdown—the breakdown of the personal sense of self as manifested by the ego, the uncoupling of the body from the "I," and the dissolution of everyday consciousness. It marks the formal erasure of the boundary between the conscious and unconscious, an erasure that the future magus must invoke at will. Successful negotiation of the Abyss represents the ultimate test of high Adeptship. The magus is one who can establish a harmonious relationship with the unconscious, working with it to achieve "Change in conformity with the Will."⁷³

The magician who makes a successful crossing of the Abyss is an initiate whose control is so complete that he can embrace personal disintegration, abandoning all knowledge or awareness of the "I," while retaining and asserting the power and authority of the magical self and will. The Adept who emerges from the experience unscathed has confronted and contained the unleashed furies of the unconscious not via the patrolling maneuvers of the myopic ego but by dint of a second operation—the exercise of an infinitely clear-sighted and all-powerful magical personality unconnected with the personal self. In this telling, the magus is a magical Adept who has glimpsed the full implications of his subjectivity. Gone forever is the limiting and limited understanding of the "I" as the finite center of his universe. He has entered the unconscious and acknowledges the permeability of its boundaries. In Crowley's case, he had experienced for himself Choronzon's ability to erase the line in the sand.

The narrative that Crowley presents of the events in the desert is written in the direct language of realism. He does not make a psychoanalytic interpretation of his experience. Crowley deals with the episode as a magical undertaking, and represents it as clear evidence that he has achieved enlightened consciousness. He felt that he had first experienced something akin to exalted awareness after the sacrifice at Da'leh Addin: "I knew who I was . . . [but] I did not exist." Crowley understood, in other words, that the "I" is simply a convenient fiction for negotiating one aspect of reality. After his

confrontation with Choronzon, he assumed that he had achieved the insights of the true magus, the Master of the Temple:

I understood that sorrow had no substance; that only my ignorance and lack of intelligence had made me imagine the existence of evil. As soon as I had destroyed my personality, as soon as I had expelled my ego, the universe which to it was indeed a frightful and fatal force, fraught with every form of fear was so only in relation to this idea "I"; so long as "I am I," all else must seem hostile.⁷⁴

As one who had "expelled" his ego and could never again experience anything in the universe as "a frightful and fatal force," Crowley now welcomed each and every new experience with a catholic embrace that refused discrimination. He increasingly incorporated what he called "repulsive rituals" into his magical practice, and the reckless irresponsibility and amorality of his later behavior is legendary.

Unsympathetic observers take 1909 to be the point at which Crowley finally achieved his true potential and went mad. In magical terms it would be understood as failing to subdue the demon Choronzon and succumbing to his curse. Certainly, Crowley acknowledged that in the aftermath of his 1909 experiences he felt utterly lost and alone. In material terms, too, things became difficult. By his midthirties Crowley had burned through his considerable fortune, and acknowledged that "it has become constantly more difficult to keep afloat."⁷⁵ Increasingly, he seems to have lost a clear sense of the distinction between the enlightened magical self, which can access the unconscious at will and acknowledges no limits, and the man Aleister Crowley, who must still function in the world. Functioning in the world requires a stable sense of personal identity, a well-defined ego, even if that ego is understood to be only part of an infinitely complex story. The magical Adept is in control of the initiated personality and can move with ease between an initiate and "uninitiate" consciousness, but Crowley's encounter with Choronzon precipitated the blurring of that critical line between the magical self and the temporal "I." The line in the sand had been erased. Crowley's subsequent behavior suggests, indeed, that he had not made a successful crossing of the Abyss—that he was caught in the grip of unconscious forces that he was unable to filter, monitor, or control. Far from establishing an all-seeing, harmonious relationship with the unconscious, working with it to achieve magical ends, the unconscious now controlled and dominated him.⁷⁶

As a self-professed Master of the Temple, Crowley went on to devise a technique for the systematic destruction of the ego—regarding it as a barrier to magical progress. During the 1920s, his followers were punished severely if they used the word *I*.⁷⁷ Crowley's insight was sound, but the technique was flawed. He was seeking to undermine the structural operation by which all meaning, including the sense of a unique, individuated, and gendered self, is produced. There can be no "I" without a clear understanding of that which is not "I"; and, as Crowley put it, "so long as 'I am I,' all else must seem hostile." He was pursuing what we might think of as the erasure of difference, a traditional goal of occultism. Conceived as moving beyond the conceptual grip of oppositional dualities—I/thou, self/other, male/female—Crowley was attempting to find a shortcut to one of the highest goals of occultism: a return to a lost Eden of wholeness and completion.

The notion of human beings as originally whole and androgynous is a persistent motif of occult and magical traditions. Crowley was certainly aware from his training in the Golden Dawn that androgyny has an occult pedigree, but it came to have a particular magical significance for him. In 1904 an event occurred that was to assume momentous importance in his life. In the spring of that year Crowley and his wife, Rose, were living in Cairo, and he was indulging his Prince Chioa Khan lifestyle. One day Rose, pregnant and in a dreamy state of mind, informed her husband that the Egyptian god Horus was awaiting him. Crowley, impressed by his wife's seemingly intuitive or mystical role as messenger, took her subsequent instructions seriously. Accordingly, at noon on the eighth, ninth, and tenth of April 1904, Crowley seated himself in his Cairo hotel room to await the will of the gods. The result—in three one-hour sessions of rapid dictation from Aiwass, an incarnate being whom Crowley regarded as his long sought-after Holy Guardian Angel, or Higher Self—was a book called *Liber AL vel Legis* or *The Book of the Law*.⁷⁸ It was this extraordinary document, written in a biblical voice and the form of a prose poem, that first proclaimed the great Rabelaisian "truth" by which Crowley was later to live: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law. . . . There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt. Love is the law, love under will."⁷⁹ The sequence of teachings that became *The Book of the Law* established that in 1904 the age of Osiris, the god who died and was resurrected, was to be replaced by the Aeon of Horus, that of the Crowned and Conquering Child. Furthermore, the communications established that the ruling characteristic of the New Aeon of Horus is the unification of the male and female as represented in the androgynous figure of Horus. Crowley was proclaimed the Prophet of this new androgynous aeon, the Beast 666.

Although Crowley rejected these teachings in 1904, they resurfaced dramatically prior to the trip to North Africa in 1909. Crowley claimed that he discovered the lost manuscript of *The Book of the Law* in his loft at Boleskine House just as Victor Neuburg was nearing the end of his Magical Retirement. Significantly, he states that its reappearance struck him like a thunderbolt, cutting the ground out from beneath his feet and sending him into a prolonged two-day meditation. He emerged from this with the clear understanding that the Secret Chiefs intended to hold him to his mission: "I understood that the disaster and misery of the last three years were due to my attempt to evade my duty. I surrendered unconditionally." Instantly, Crowley felt a sense of release. A tragedy in the Himalayas when members of his climbing expedition had lost their lives, the death of his daughter, the "long crucifixion of home life," the uphill struggle in his magical work, were over and put behind him. He acknowledged that his marriage to Rose was finished. Crowley felt for the first time since 1904 that he was free to do his will, and understood what his will was: "I had merely to establish in the world the Law which had been given me to proclaim." He understood, too, that he had been fighting against himself for five years, and had "wasted some of the best years of my life in the stupid and stubborn struggle to set up my conscious self against its silent sovereign, my true soul."⁸⁰ If this was Crowley's reaction to the rediscovered *The Book of the Law* in the summer of 1909, it seems likely that his destiny as the Prophet of the androgynous Aeon of Horus was very much on his mind as he made his way through the desert with Victor Neuburg only a few months later.

But the androgynous figure, so important in occult teachings and for Crowley personally, was also an icon of the fin de siècle. Aubrey Beardsley's androgynous illustrations for the *Yellow Book* and the *Savoy* were expressions of an anarchic sexuality that was closely associated with the "decadent" "yellow nineties," and Beardsley had been a friend of Crowley's first love, Jerome Pollitt. The "decadent" figures of Beardsley and Oscar Wilde were associated for Crowley with the liberating years of his youth, and in key respects he remained wedded throughout his life to the outlook and modus operandi of the "decadent" movement. A *poseur extraordinaire* in the style of Wilde, and a man who set out to replicate in life the dark, wicked, luxurious world of the fictional Dorian Gray, Crowley consistently experimented with the inversion of dominant categories. This was as much the case with his magic as with his own sexuality and gender identity; in each case, and in different but related ways, he played on the "yellow" theme of perverse delinquency. When the New Aeon of Horus was announced in 1904, and beckoned once again in 1909, Crowley cannot have been altogether unre-

sponsive. For *The Book of the Law* can be read as a hymn to “decadence,” while androgyny—possibly the ultimate heterodox masculinity—was an attribute that Crowley wished to claim for himself.

Writing in the 1920s, Crowley maintained that he had long held the conviction that he was in certain respects both male and female. Speaking of himself in the third person, a distancing technique reminiscent of Dr. Jekyll’s disclaimer,⁸¹ Crowley notes that while “his masculinity is above the normal,” he possesses female characteristics like slight, graceful limbs and well-developed breasts:

There is thus a sort of hermaphroditism in his physical structure; and this is naturally expressed in his mind. But whereas, in most similar cases, the feminine qualities appear at the expense of manhood, in him they are added to a perfectly normal masculine type. The principal effect has been to enable him to understand the psychology of women, to look at any theory with comprehensive and impartial eyes, and to endow him with maternal instincts on spiritual planes. . . . He has been able to philosophize about nature from the standpoint of a complete human being; certain phenomena will always be unintelligible to men as such, others, to women as such. He, by being both at once, has been able to formulate a view of existence which combines the positive and the negative, the active and the passive, in a single identical equation. . . . Again and again . . . we shall find his actions determined by this dual structure.⁸²

While Crowley is here articulating the gendered categories of masculinity and femininity in essentialist terms, also an aspect of traditional occult philosophy, he conceives of himself as embodying a beneficial “dual structure”: he is “both at once.” Physical “hermaphroditism” is therefore replicated in terms of gender, and represented as giving him the privileged insight of “a complete human being.” Crowley maintained that his “dual structure” enabled him to act in the world and “philosophize” about it with an unusual degree of acuity and success. Furthermore, this “dual structure” extended to his sexual identity: he was flagrantly bisexual. There was no shortage of women in Crowley’s life, and the Crowley mythology paints him as a tender and inventive lover. He was, in fact, prey to powerful and contradictory attitudes towards women, but these remained largely unacknowledged. Crowley believed that he was irresistible, and that his success as a heterosexual lover was due to his unique ability to express (an again essentialized) “savage male passion to create” modified by a “feminine” gentleness.⁸³ Bisexuality is

not the same as “hermaphroditism” or androgyny, but in Crowley’s mind his sexuality was yet another expression of the wholeness implied by his “being both at once.”

There is every indication that Victor Neuburg shared this view, and that he applied it to himself. In a long poem in the *Triumph of Pan*, a collection published in 1910 which incorporates a complex amalgam of personal and magical references, Neuburg writes: “O thou hast sucked my soul, lord of my nights and days, / My body, pure and whole, is merged within the ways / That lead to thee, my queen, who gav’st life to me / When all my heart was green.”⁸⁴ These lines, addressed to Pan, contain that element of Crowley’s relationship to Neuburg—he is both “lord” and “queen”—which must form at least a subtext for the poem if not the collection. Similarly, there can be little doubt about Neuburg’s meaning in the title poem: “there is a Great One, cold and burning, / Crafty and hot in lust, / Who would make me a Sapphist and an Urning, / A Lesbian of the dust.”⁸⁵ Whether or not the “Great One” is Crowley, it is clear that Neuburg experienced his spirituality as a sexualized (or bisexualized) “Sapphist” and “Urning.”

The use of the term *Urning* gives a specific clue to Neuburg’s thinking. The term, familiar from Plato’s *Symposium*, had been adopted by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs half a century earlier in his discussion of homosexuality, and reappeared in a book that greatly influenced Neuburg, Edward Carpenter’s *Intermediate Sex*. A great admirer of Carpenter, who was no stranger to Eastern religion and philosophy, and perhaps particularly taken with the suggestion that homosexuality might represent a new evolutionary form, Neuburg apparently absorbed the discussion of what Carpenter called the “doubleness of nature”—the feminine soul trapped within the male body, and vice versa. In *The Triumph of Pan*, however, Neuburg reworks it, combining contemporary discussions of homosexuality with the enduring motif of the hermaphrodite. When he positions himself in his poem as both woman-desiring woman and man-desiring man, Neuburg is claiming a radically different “hermaphroditism”: two “inversions” “at once.”

Crowley, on the other hand, experienced his bisexuality in classic psychoanalytic terms as “the coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche.”⁸⁶ This meant that, as a desiring man, Crowley gave vent to what he took to be the ultimate expression of masculinity—the (albeit modified) “savage male passion to create”; as a desiring woman, he sought to become the beautiful object of that “savage male passion.” He often used the name Alys (a feminized form of Aleister) to signify his femininity, and, as Alys, adopted what he thought of as the feminine sexual role.

In his relationship with Victor Neuburg, Crowley assumed the subject position of a desiring woman. In doing so, however, he was caught up in a fantasy that went far beyond the receptive “feminine.” As the object of male desire, Crowley was in thrall to a scenario marked by orgiastic violation. This was exemplified in his relationship with Neuburg by the central importance assumed by the god Pan—“All devourer, all begetter”; to know “Panic” is to experience both ecstasy and terror at the hand of the god.⁸⁷ Pan, representative of a pagan Greece that had special significance for Victorian homosexual men, and long associated in the Christian imagination with the devil, was a powerful signifier of the sexualized magic initiated by the two men.⁸⁸ When Crowley and Neuburg speak of Pan, the imagery is redolent with heat and violence; a god, half man, half beast, who rapes and ravishes men and women alike. Crowley, who in his younger years had feared and sought to avoid pain, actively recruited it as a woman. And as a desiring woman, Crowley acted out a fantasy in which he became the recipient of his own unrecognized hostility towards women. If his “dual structure” consistently modified the sadistic impulses of his masculine sexuality, it also facilitated—like the great circle of loose rocks at Da’leh Addin—a kind of closure. In a dual identification, he became the sacrificial object of his own desires.

The “sacrifice” at Da’leh Addin, during which Crowley experienced “the annihilation of the Self in Pan” and consummation with “that primal and final breath . . . of God,” in fact represents a primal scene of considerable significance. It is one in which an erotic investment in pain and desecration, an investment that increasingly figured in the “repulsive rituals” of his magical practice, was played out in vivid tandem with fantasies of bestiality and male rape. The strong masochistic element that ran through his various sexual identifications, and that Crowley recognized as a constituent element of both his masculinity and femininity, reached its apotheosis in the sacrificial moment.⁸⁹ But the “sacrifice” equally marks that elision of identifications, magical and mundane, upon which the Crowley-Neuburg relationship endlessly turned. For just as Crowley could insist that Victor Neuburg, in one incarnation the savage god, was equally a “masochist” and a “pederast,” so, too, Neuburg experienced Crowley, his seemingly feminized lover, as a “homo-sexual sadist.” It is likely that Crowley’s expressive femininity had little to do with the apparent powerlessness it celebrated. A sexual scene dominated by the elaboration of a rape fantasy was probably directed and controlled, like everything else in their relationship, by Crowley himself. Crowley glosses the ritual on the mountain with the simple comment: “there I sacrificed myself.” Both active and passive, avowal and disavowal, he who sacrifices and he who is sacrificed, Crowley acknowledges the ambiguity of

the covenant. He closes the account with a final significant move of disavowal and displacement: "There was an animal in the wilderness, but it was not I."⁹⁰



Crowley's is a Manichean vision in which the principles of light and darkness do eternal battle, and in which supreme magical attainments are inextricably bound up with a "savage" bestiality. After crossing the Abyss in 1909, Crowley finally accepted *The Book of the Law*, and with it his destiny as the prophet of Horus. The desert experience confirmed for both Crowley and Neuburg (although only temporarily, in Neuburg's case) the conviction that they were privileged parties to the dawning of a new aeon governed by the glorious occult motif of two-in-one. But if Horus represents the ultimate patricide, the death of God-the-Father and his replacement with the androgynous motif of heterodox spiritual tradition, it is salutary to reflect on the resilience of male subjectivity as it heralds its displacement in the new order of things. Crowley remained, in all senses of the word, a Master. As the prophet of Horus he accepted the title of the Beast 666 and began to live by the ruling: "There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt." The message was starkly simple. It took the Golden Dawn's "Know Thyself" to its logical conclusion, approximating to the ancient Greek exhortation to "Know Thyself; then Be Thyself."

It is possible that after 1909 Crowley was able to fully recognize and be himself only as the Beast. Although this means that he remained enmeshed within the very familial and biblical terms that he so adamantly rejected, the appropriation of "the beast" of the Book of Revelation nevertheless inverted those terms in an ultimate gesture of self-assertion and defiance.⁹¹ In the immediate aftermath of 1909 Neuburg welcomed and celebrated Crowley as the Beast, and the two men went on to experiment with homosexual magical work.⁹² By 1914, however, Neuburg must have felt that he simply could not carry on. In the autumn of that ill-fated year he met Crowley and broke with him. On that occasion Crowley apparently ritually cursed Neuburg in a terrifying formula said to be linked with the god Pan. Neuburg suffered a nervous collapse and lived thereafter in constant fear of Crowley's return.⁹³

Crowley meanwhile had become involved with German Templarism, and in 1912 was initiated into the Ordo Templi Orientis and its teachings on sex magic. The Order claimed a medieval Knights Templar pedigree, and played upon the Templar's alleged associations with heresy, sodomy, and

bestiality. Maintaining that sex magic lay behind the symbolism of Freemasonry and Hermeticism, the Ordo Templi Orientis taught a form of sexualized spirituality very similar to that of the left-hand Path of Bengali Tantrism.⁹⁴ Its higher grades were concerned with autoerotic and heterosexual magic, and the latter, as in tantric rites, could culminate in sexual intercourse. Crowley later added an elevated grade concerned with homosexual magic. The Ordo Templi Orientis regarded the act of sexual intercourse as the holiest of the religious sacraments, and Crowley brought to this his own versions of sexual practice interlaced with what he now took to be relevant veiled teachings in *The Book of the Law*.

As Baphomet, a name carrying strong Templar associations, Crowley became the head of the British branch of the Ordo Templi Orientis and recast certain of its rituals according to his own lights. He came to believe that magical rites and invocations performed in conjunction with specific sexual acts, as had happened apparently instinctively at Da'leh Addin, produce unsurpassed results. After the outbreak of war and his parting from Neuburg in 1914, the pro-German Crowley left England for the United States, and there followed a period of about four years during which he furthered his experiments with sex magic. These were recorded in three magical diaries entitled *Rex De Arte Magica*, and it is clear that by this time Crowley was using casual sexual encounters as well as human waste in ritualized sex magic.⁹⁵ Crowley then began to adopt his trademark spelling of "Magick," which, among other things, was intended to signify the sexual content of Crowleyite magical practice.⁹⁶

In 1920 Crowley established his infamous Abbey of Thelema at Cefalu, in Sicily. Its byword, painted above the door, was part of what Crowley called the Law of Thelema: "Do What Thou Wilt." It was here that he lived with Leah Hirsig, the "Scarlet Woman" and most important of his magical consorts, but women and men came and went and with them extraordinary tales of life under the law. Crowley's acceptance of the designation "the Beast 666," which in occult circles is synonymous with his name, and shortly thereafter, Baphomet, had marked a new phase in his magical work. Pain, blood, sexual fluids, and excrement became the trademarks of Crowley's "repulsive rituals," and his followers were obliged to wear upon their bodies "the Mark of the Beast."⁹⁷ Stories of bizarre and dangerous sexual orgies began to circulate, Crowley himself believing that "[e]ach individual has an absolute right to satisfy his sexual instinct as is physiologically proper for him. The one injunction is to treat all such acts as sacraments."⁹⁸ At Thelema any and all sexual acts were so treated. They became part of Thelemite magical practice.

Sensationalized accounts of Crowley's exploits were circulated in the popular press, and by the early 1920s he had secured his reputation as "the king of depravity" and "the wickedest man in the world"—a reputation that included (probably quite wrongly) a propensity for ritual murder. Crowley was denounced as a devil-worshipping "human beast," and after only three years at Cefalu was expelled from Italy by Mussolini.⁹⁹ In an ironic reversal of his own earlier conception of his "two personalities," Crowley came to personify in the public imagination a kind of slaving, animalistic Mr. Hyde. He was transformed into the monstrous creature of Crowley legend, a black magician of mythic status whose demonic persona was reminiscent of W. T. Stead's Jack the Ripper—the sadistic murderer with an eroticized and "uncontrollable taste for blood."¹⁰⁰ Crowley had become the modern representative of a fin-de-siècle "cult of the beast"; the monster howling at the dark side of the moon.¹⁰¹

Crowley's is a cautionary tale. A man of considerable gifts, he devoted his life to pushing the boundaries of his mundane and magical worlds in pursuit of an ultimate reality. His is the story of a man who kicked against the traces of a stifling Victorian upbringing, inverting every conventional category, and challenging all limits in a ceaseless search for self-realization: the occult truth of Knowing and Being. But the occult truth that he sought and claimed was precisely situated. Crowley might have been Perdurabo, a master magician who explored the conceptual universe of a sixteenth-century magus, but he clearly brought *himself* to that endeavor. Perdurabo was the magical personality of an early twentieth-century middle-class man with very specific proclivities whose reworking of past magical practice was in constant dialogue with the concerns of the present. In magical terms, Crowley's work was fatally flawed precisely because he was finally unable to distinguish between the magical self and the temporal "I." In mundane terms, however, it is clear that Aleister Crowley's magical work was intrinsically bound up with the articulation of what we have come to understand as a modern sense of self. Certainly, one reading of his North African experience is that advanced ritual magic invited a radical "modernist" decentering of the subject, even as it pursued the occult goal of repairing a split and divided self.¹⁰² Crowley's experiment indicates that magical practice, with its supposedly timeless procedures and "truths," was both an intensely personal and a culturally specific enterprise. Whatever we might make of the magical episteme, it would be difficult to deny that the "two personalities" are in some way constitutive of the particular historical actor. The magus was the man.

I have sought to argue here that Crowley's magical work, flawed or oth-

erwise, represented a self-conscious engagement with the self in all its complexity, recognized and unrecognizable, known and unknown. The episode in the desert suggests that the enlightened magical self—created through the erasure of psychic boundaries, and the unraveling of the processes through which the “I” is constituted—might represent the expression of a *fully realized*, historically contingent subjectivity. It is clear that Crowley’s magical exploration of the Aethyrs undertaken in the name of Perdurabo was simultaneously a direct interrogation of the undisclosed phenomena of the personal self. The displaced “I” of the magus was expressive of a historicized self, and Crowley’s experience in 1909 involved the display of unconscious elements as specific and theatrical as anything created by Robert Louis Stevenson. His magical work was intrinsically bound up with the enactment of fears, hostilities, and desires that circulated around the expression of a rogue bourgeois masculinity. Certainly the subtext of Crowley’s account of events in the desert is a narrative of self that exceeds the exoteric revelations of his *Confessions*. Whatever the merits and demerits of Crowley’s magical work, his struggles in the desert—symbolized by the “sacrifice” at Da’leh Addin, the encounter with Choronzon, and that final despairing cry, “I am I”—signified an extraordinary attempt on the part of this Edwardian bourgeois to understand the full implications of his own subjectivity.

Although Crowley did not cast his life’s work in this way, the relentless interrogation of subjectivity that his magical methods imply suggests a modern enterprise of heroic if tragic proportions. As a man, Crowley died virtually penniless in 1947 at the age of seventy-two. But as a modern icon, he became a cult antihero of the 1960s and allegedly has his place on the sleeve of the Beatles album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*.¹⁰³ And as a magician he decorated the left-hand Path with the forbidden names of dark power to produce an influential demonic Magick that is very much with us today.

CHAPTER SEVEN

After Armageddon

Holbrook Jackson's classic analysis of the 1890s as the decade that saw "the beginning of the revival of mysticism" has withstood the test of time.¹ The kind of occultism that began to flourish in the 1890s was to resonate with modern women and men up to and beyond the Great War. Certainly by 1913 it was clear to Jackson, as to others, that the "mystical" revival had not been a flash in the pan. The signs were everywhere. The Bergsonian vogue was in full swing, Theosophy was consolidating its position as the most outwardly visible bearer of the occult message; smaller groups such as the Quest Society were attracting a modernist literary coterie that included T. E. Hulme, Wyndham Lewis, and Ezra Pound; spinoffs of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn proliferated behind the scenes; and the "mystical" Christianity epitomized by Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism* continued unabated. This spiritual "revival" was born of dissatisfaction with conventional religion coupled with a distaste for the narrow materialism that appeared to stand in its stead, and behind much of it lay an emphasis on interiority and the value of personal religious experience, which had affinities with Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater on the one hand and Max Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche on the other. In its occult variation "mysticism" was simultaneously a response to the "soul sickness" of the 1890s and an acknowledgment of the modern skeptical self. Indeed, fin-de-siècle occultism was epitomized by a desire for and ultimate confidence in the spiritual potential implicit in the subsequent "egoistical" rallying cry "I am"—a cry so reminiscent of Aleister Crowley's epic struggle with Choronzon in the desert.² But if the "mystical" mood at the turn of the century was characterized by a distinctively modern "individualist" turn, it was also, like Crowley's desperate struggle, caught up in a growing sense of a generally darkening landscape.

Occultism, like the *fin de siècle* itself, was suffused with portents of impending apocalypse. For occultists at the turn of the century it seemed clear that a cataclysmic confrontation with the demonic forces of evil was fast approaching. The kind of millennialism that characterized much of the discussion of the new age was interwoven with motifs of ferment and destruction, and many occultists associated this with Madame Blavatsky's teaching that during the last years of the old century the world would move into a new cycle of spiritual development. As the 1890s progressed, occultists became increasingly convinced that the signs pointed to a forthcoming mighty struggle between the forces of good and evil. This was conceived in terms of Armageddon, the great symbolic battlefield of the Apocalypse in the Book of Revelation. Within the advanced ranks of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn such a prospect was taken almost as a commonplace. W. B. Yeats was inquiring of Florence Farr in a letter that was probably written in 1895:

My dear SSDD. [sic] has the magical armageddon [sic] begun at last? I notice that the "Freemans [sic] Journal" the only Irish paper I have seen has an article from its London correspondent announcing inevitable war. . . . The war would fulfil the prophets and especially a prophetic vision I had long ago with the Mathers's, and so far be for the glory of God but what a dusk of nations it would be? for surely it would drag in half the world. What have your divinations said or have they said anything? When will you be in town next? Could you come and see me on Monday and have tea and perhaps divine for armageddon [sic]?³

A senior magician like Yeats spoke of an imminent "magical armageddon" in the same breath as he inquired about the possibility of taking tea. It required no elaboration. Certainly Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers had been speaking of "the imminence of immense wars" since the early 1890s, and Florence Farr's "Sphere" group was dedicated to working for world peace.⁴

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the circles within which he moved, Aleister Crowley's encounter with destiny in Cairo in 1904 was similarly charged with dark prophecy of blood and sacrifice. Crowley, like his occult associates, was convinced that the world stood poised at the threshold of a new age, and the teachings received through Aiwass and enshrined in *Liber AL vel Legis*, or *The Book of the Law* made foreboding reference to a New Aeon characterized by "Force and Fire." Crowley subsequently claimed that the Secret Chiefs had informed him that "a New Aeon implied the breaking up of the

civilization existing at the time,” and noted that the New Aeon of Horus “would be marked by the collapse of humanitarianism.” With the benefit of hindsight, Crowley could say of Horus that the “first act of his reign would naturally be to plunge the world into the catastrophe of a huge and ruthless war.”⁵ Crowley’s preoccupations, though, however idiosyncratic in the translation, were nevertheless not so wide of the “mystical” mark. Indeed, others were convinced that the new century augured more than one terrible war. Isabelle de Steiger, schooled in Theosophy, magic, and spiritualism, was cautioning in 1912 that the “mighty, future fight will not culminate in the great European war.” “When things have calmed down after those great issues are settled,” she predicted, “there will come that mighty war which will decide whether this earth is to become an earthly Paradise, filled with a new generation who understand what happiness is.” Within four years she was insisting with seeming prescience that although the Great War was deemed to be “Armageddon, it precedes the real one.”⁶

War was on the minds of spiritualists as well as those occultists of a theurgical persuasion. Well in advance of 1914 there was talk of a great impending threat to civilization among “mediums and clairvoyants all over the world,” who were receiving related warnings from eminent entities in the spirit world.⁷ The war itself was to have a profound impact on the occult landscape, as thousands of grieving women and men turned to spiritualist mediums as a source of solace and hope. During the Great War and its aftermath spiritualism once again enjoyed a boom reminiscent of its Victorian heyday. Oliver Lodge, the eminent physicist and, since 1900, the principal of the University of Birmingham, was a leader of the new spiritualist revival. His championship of the spiritualist cause was associated in the popular mind with the death of his son Raymond in Flanders in 1915. But while the publication in 1916 of Lodge’s best-selling book *Raymond* presented the case for ongoing communication with the fallen, Lodge himself had become convinced before the outbreak of war of the immortality of the human spirit.⁸ Similarly, the beliefs of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, perhaps the most famous exponent of modern spiritualism, had been long in the making when he announced his conversion to spiritualism in 1916. The war, however, effectively triggered the public reactions of both men. It was around the time of the deaths of his son and brother late in the war that Conan Doyle began the proselytizing mission that was to absorb him for the remainder of his life. He became an international spokesman for the cause, undertaking lengthy tours of Australia, the United States, Canada, and elsewhere, and between 1918 and his death in 1930 wrote eleven nonfiction books dealing with some aspect of spiritualism.⁹ Conan Doyle considered

his spiritualist crusade to be the most important work of his life, and his message continued to reach a ready audience even as the collective memory of the war slowly began to fade.¹⁰

Interestingly, in his younger days Conan Doyle seems to have been screened as a possible candidate for the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Writing in 1924, he recalled a much earlier encounter with what could only have been that Magical Order. He remembered that about 1898 he had been approached by an apparently inconsequential neighbor and physician, “Dr Pullen Bury” [sic], who had invited him to “join a secret society of esoteric students.” Pullen Bury had suggested that the society could afford Conan Doyle powers often thought of as supernatural but which in fact involved deep knowledge of the forces of nature. Conan Doyle expressed cautious interest, but particularly after a “queer and disagreeable” sense that he was being somehow interrogated from afar, decided that he did not wish to proceed.

In a postscript to this episode Conan Doyle recounted meeting Pullen Bury in the company of another medical man, one who was immediately familiar to him “in connection with exploration and tropical service.” To Conan Doyle’s astonishment, this older and rather distinguished individual was clearly deferential to Pullen Bury, who went on to speak of his companion as “one of my initiates.” Everything points to this initiate being Dr. R. W. Felkin, an expert in tropical medicine who had been initiated into the Golden Dawn in 1894. Pullen Bury was highly active within the Golden Dawn by the mid-1890s, and in Conan Doyle’s presence the two men carried on an animated conversation that clearly related to Astral Travel. Thinking about this episode, Conan Doyle commented:

I remain under the impression that I brushed against something strange, and something that I am not sorry that I avoided. It was not Spiritualism and it was not Theosophy, but rather the acquisition of powers latent in the human organisation, after the alleged fashion of the old gnostics or of some modern fakirs in India, though some, doubtless, would spell fakirs with an “e.”

Unsettled even in memory by this “something strange,” Conan Doyle concluded, “One thing I am very sure of, and that is that morals and ethics have to keep pace with knowledge, or all is lost.” He was referring to spiritual knowledge, and Conan Doyle remained convinced that “Christian ethics can *never* lose their place whatever expansion our psychic faculties may enjoy.”¹¹

The Golden Dawn, of course, had been committed to the kind of Chris-

tian ethics espoused earlier by Anna Kingsford, but the difficulty of ensuring the ethical goals that featured so strongly in the Rosicrucianism of the Golden Dawn was borne out by events as they unfolded within the occult world. Although spiritualism became once again the dominant “mystical” force during the Great War, this did not mean that different representatives of the occult tradition had necessarily ceded ground. The occultism that had flourished at the fin de siècle was still in existence, albeit in sometimes altered form. Dr. Felkin went on to assume a prominent position within the Golden Dawn’s Second Order just after the turn of the century, and it was he who maintained within the newly named Stella Matutina what was left of the old Golden Dawn after the quarrels and schisms of that period.

Dr. Felkin’s Stella Matutina, heir to the kind of magical work that had developed under Florence Farr’s leadership of the Golden Dawn’s Second Order, became increasingly involved with the astral work practiced by the controversial “Secret Groups.” This astral work slowly got out of hand, losing sight of the carefully structured techniques and goals that had formed the basis for such endeavors within the Golden Dawn. After Felkin’s departure for New Zealand in 1916, the Stella Matutina’s Amoun Temple in London fell into complete disarray and was finally closed. W. B. Yeats, who had maintained a connection with the Stella Matutina, probably left the Order in 1923 around the time that it became embroiled in the old controversy surrounding the Golden Dawn’s originary credentials. The erstwhile Chief of the Amoun Temple, Christina Stoddart, subsequently went to press espousing a garbled protofascism and alleging that Magical Orders were caught up in a Jewish world conspiracy. Her book *Light-Bearers of Darkness* remains, although not in the way that the author intended, an object lesson in the impossibility of guaranteeing the ethical moorings of occultism—even when that occultism has been dedicated, in the tradition of the Golden Dawn, to the Great Work of bringing the world into the Light.¹²

This occult ideal was placed under a certain strain by the outbreak of war in 1914. War with Germany posed something of a problem for individual occultists, just as it did for anyone with strong German ties. Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, and Theosophy each had a flourishing German dimension, and Dr. Felkin and his wife were actually visiting German Rosicrucian and Masonic friends when war was declared. It was rumored that they were hurried out of the country by their high-ranking occult contacts. J. W. Brodie-Innes of the old Golden Dawn had already broken with Felkin over the issue of the latter’s German connections, but there remained the difficult question of how hostilities with Germany were to be interpreted. The elderly Theosophist A. P. Sinnett was one of those who regarded the war as part of

the eternal struggle between the Black and the White Brotherhoods, while Annie Besant (president of the Theosophical Society) equally took the long view that the war was perhaps a necessary preparation for Blavatsky's prophesied spiritual renewal. Necessary or not, however, Besant had no doubt where her loyalties lay. She was quick to accept enmity with Germany, and it was a considerable effort for her to acknowledge the Theosophical ideal of an international Brotherhood that must include many German followers. She promoted a message of fierce imperial loyalty in the face of the German threat, even as she steadfastly maintained her Home Rule and Self-Government for India positions. But while some were prepared to accept Germany as the embodiment of the forces of evil, others were not. There were those within the Theosophical Society who insisted throughout the war that the new spiritual order must include Germans and Austrians, and some (including the new secretary of the German Section) suggested that Sinnett and Mrs. Besant would do well to keep their unconstitutional and bellicose opinions to themselves.¹³

Aleister Crowley, long the renegade, held unabashedly pro-German sympathies (although he also liked to play the patriot), and left England for the United States towards the end of 1914. Crowley had by then become involved with German Templarism, which like the Golden Dawn had strong roots in Freemasonry, and he had been initiated into the Ordo Templi Orientis (Order of the Templars of the Orient) at the invitation of the Head of its Outer Order, Theodor Reuss. There were allegations that this man, apparently half English and half German, had been a spy for the German Secret Service during the previous century, but this was unlikely to concern Crowley.¹⁴ He was doubtless also unperturbed by the cooling of relations between German Freemasonry and the Order Templi Orientis by 1914, drawn as he was to the "sexual magic" taught by these modern Templi. The Order's premises in London were raided by the Metropolitan Police in 1916, possibly as a direct result of Crowley's pro-German activities in the United States, and his reputation in Britain during the 1920s made it difficult for Crowley's O.T.O. followers to continue their operations. Crowley claimed to have become the head of the Order in 1922, but the majority of German initiates dissociated themselves from his leadership after they read his *Book of the Law* in German translation. Thereafter two Orders coexisted, but both effectively ceased to function in Germany after occult organizations were closed down during the 1930s by the Nazi authorities.¹⁵

The Matherses weathered the war in Paris, where according to Yeats MacGregor Mathers "turned his house into a recruiting office and raised six hundred volunteers for the Foreign Legion."¹⁶ The war apparently allowed

Mathers to indulge his martial passion, but he died in November 1918 during the terrible influenza epidemic that swept through Europe as the war drew to a close. British control of Mathers's Alpha and Omega Temple had by this time passed to the aging Brodie-Innes, but Moina MacGregor Mathers assumed an influential role following the death of her husband. Moina Mathers proved as temperamental and autocratic as her husband had been, and she subsequently came into conflict with one of the most significant clairvoyants and occultists of the postwar period—Violet Firth, or as she later chose to be known, Dion Fortune. Firth had been initiated into the Alpha and Omega in 1919 as a young woman, but ran afoul of Moina Mathers after she began to develop an increasingly independent stance. Firth's own Fraternity of the Inner Light, formed in 1922 as a more youthful and open complement to the old Golden Dawn, posed a challenge to the authority of Moina Mathers, who responded by expelling her from the Alpha and Omega.

Firth asserted that one of the charges leveled against her by Moina Mathers was that she had revealed secret Golden Dawn teachings in her book *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage*, which suggests that there was some reference to "sex magic" in the highest grades of the Golden Dawn.¹⁷ As the century progressed, however, there were further revelations of "inner" Golden Dawn teachings. Francis Israel Regardie, who had studied with Aleister Crowley during the late 1920s, published a book entitled *The Tree of Life*, which disclosed the magical system taught by MacGregor Mathers during the early days of the Golden Dawn. This book was praised by Violet Firth, who correctly predicted that it would become an occult classic. Regardie went on to join the Stella Matutina and, ultimately, publish many of the Golden Dawn's manuscript teachings and rituals in a four-volume work.¹⁸ This exposure of the Golden Dawn's arcane corpus ultimately led to the demise of both the Stella Matutina and the Alpha and Omega, but Regardie's published materials were to become the working basis for an entirely new generation of occultists after the Second World War.

Of the original Golden Dawn cohort, several key figures chose to make their final home outside Britain. S. L. MacGregor Mathers, of course, had lived in France for over twenty years by the time of his death. Others traced paths, spiritual and otherwise, that traversed metropolis and empire. Florence Farr left England for Ceylon in 1912 and died there in April 1917 following an operation for breast cancer. Her decision to leave England took many of her friends by surprise and she never fully explained it, but her years in Ceylon as the lady principal of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan's College for Girls were happy. She followed the course of the war in Europe

from afar, and continued to consider the karmic implications of her own life and the spiritual implications of world events. Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, a deeply spiritual man who had earlier employed the Theosophist and talented Golden Dawn Adept Allan Bennett as tutor to his sons, remained her loyal friend.¹⁹ Farr's physician recorded that during her final days she expressed no regret for her "homeland, never expressed a wish to have her kith and kin about her. She was at home with devoted friends . . . and appeared to be perfectly happy."²⁰ How well this accords with the Florence Farr of the Golden Dawn days—a woman who made few emotional demands on others and consistently sought freedom from worldly ties. Meanwhile, Dr. Felkin had left England for New Zealand in 1916, while William Wynn Westcott, one of the founding fathers of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, spent his last years in South Africa. Westcott became vice president of two Theosophical Society Lodges in Durban, and remained in contact with his old Golden Dawn and close Theosophical friends at home. By 1924, however, a year before his death in June 1925, Westcott had become convinced that the Secret Chiefs were no longer in communication. Equally seriously, and in contrast with the expectations of some Theosophists, he saw "no Great Teacher coming to manifest before 1925, even if then."²¹

This was a reference to those within the Theosophical Society who looked to Jiddu Krishnamurti, a young Brahmin, as the great avatar and World Teacher of the new spiritual order. Krishnamurti, the son of a Theosophist and civil servant in the British administration, had been "discovered" in 1909 by Charles Webster Leadbeater and groomed by Annie Besant and others to assume his spiritual destiny as the chosen Vehicle of the Lord Maitreya-Bodhisattva-Christ. Besant named Krishnamurti as head of a new Order of the Star in the East, an international movement established by her in 1911, and threw herself into the work of preparing the world for the Coming of the World Teacher. The Order of the Star in the East was technically separate from the Theosophical Society, but in practice its officers and membership were drawn from Theosophical ranks. In answer to those who disputed her right to impose her beliefs about Krishnamurti upon the Theosophical Society, Besant replied that Blavatsky herself had "regarded it as the mission of the TS to prepare the world for the coming of the next great Teacher, although she put that event perhaps half a century later than I do."²² Many of those who disagreed with her left the Theosophical Society about this time, including Rudolph Steiner, secretary of the German Section, who took many German Theosophists with him into his Anthroposophical Society. The resurfacing of the old allegations against Leadbeater,

this time in connection with Krishnamurti, did nothing to help the situation.²³ Krishnamurti was later to distance himself from his erstwhile supporters and all forms of organized "Truth." He disbanded the Order of the Star in 1929, four years before Besant's death, declaring that "Truth is a pathless land" and "cannot be organised."²⁴ He went on to become a spiritual philosopher and teacher with a worldwide reputation and following, albeit one who refused the mantle of greatness as conceived by Besant and Leadbeater. Krishnamurti died in 1986 at the age of ninety-one.

Annie Besant died in India in 1933, some forty-odd years after her first encounter with Madame Blavatsky. India and Theosophy had been the interrelated focus of her attention since the 1890s. Her promotion of Indian Home Rule during the war had led to her brief internment, and her stance won her the support at the time of leading political figures like Pandit Motilal Nehru and his son, the future prime minister of independent India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In fact, the latter had been briefly tutored at the turn of the century by a Theosophist recommended by Besant. Meeting with Besant after her release, Edwin Montague, the newly appointed secretary of state for India, bemoaned the fact that the British government had not taken steps to keep this influential old woman on its side. Her work in the Indian cause, however, was not without its difficulties. Many disapproved of her elitist and antidemocratic vision of an independent India ruled by a kind of benign high-caste priesthood, ideas that were closely related to her occultism, and Besant found herself in antagonistic relationship to Mohandas Gandhi, who succeeded her as president of the Home Rule League. Similarly, her control of the Theosophical Society was not without controversy. Besant's ongoing support for Leadbeater, championing of Krishnamurti, and attempt to generate a World Mother movement around the person of Rukmini Devi Arundale, the young Indian wife of a leading Theosophist, were each received with consternation in certain quarters. Nevertheless, under her presidency, membership of the Theosophical Society rose to forty-five thousand by 1928, and her cremation site overlooking the Adyar River was decorated with the flags of fifty-four countries with established Theosophical connections. Leadbeater, who would survive Besant by only a few months, officiated at the cremation ceremony. As India publicly mourned Besant's passing, her *Times* obituary remarked on the damage that Leadbeater had done to the reputation of this remarkable woman.²⁵

But while the various scandals surrounding Leadbeater had a detrimental effect on Annie Besant's public standing, his own occult reputation took some interesting and unexpected turns. There have always been those within occultism who have supported Leadbeater's visionary claims, but his

influence (and that of the occult more generally) was also evident in post-Symbolist art after the turn of the century. Indeed, *Thought-Forms*, a book coauthored by Leadbeater and Besant that had appeared in French and German translation by 1908, was being read and debated in Parisian artistic circles about the time that painters such as Wassily Kandinsky were producing their early abstract works. Kandinsky, who was interested in Theosophy and the ideas of Rudolph Steiner, apparently owned a copy of the first German edition of *Thought-Forms* and continued to refer to it for many years. Kandinsky's own book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, published in 1911, owed a clear debt to Theosophical ideas, and it has been suggested that his elaboration of the relationship between form and color is closely tied to Leadbeater's ideas about astral coloration.²⁶ Other influential painters of this period, Piet Mondrian among them, were similarly influenced by Theosophical ideas, and an exhibition mounted in Britain during the 1970s made explicit reference to the connections between the original artwork used in *Thought-Forms*, Leadbeater's subsequent *Man Visible and Invisible*, and the paintings of Mondrian and Kandinsky.²⁷ The occult influence was to make itself felt in Surrealism, where it was integral to a complex aesthetic that privileged the kind of inspired interiority sought by fin-de-siècle magicians. It was no accident that key figures like Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst were deeply interested in alchemical symbolism, or that one of the later British surrealists should write an account of the magic of S. L. MacGregor Mathers and its legacy.²⁸

The surrealist quest for the "marvelous" in everyday life was caught up with a concept of "absolute reality" that was familiar to occultists trained in the schools of Theosophy and magic. In particular, the concept of "surreality" drew on notions of a lucid expansive consciousness and reconciliation of the dreaming and waking states that were so relevant for occultism. Above all, perhaps, in its commitment to the power of the imagination and of "psychic activity" in the creation of reality, Surrealism allied itself at once with certain aspects of both advanced occultism and psychoanalysis. André Breton specifically named both the occult and Freud in his 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism*, and it is not hard to see the connections. Breton, in a statement with which neither Freud nor the occultists would have argued, noted that "[i]f the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them—first to seize them, then, if need be, to submit them to the control of our reason."²⁹ Never strangers to one another, and different though they were in many respects, these three movements—Surrealism, occultism, and psychoanalysis—in fact represented different points

on a spectrum broadly dedicated to understanding the full implications of a transformed human consciousness. Where surrealists might pursue the alchemical realization of the unconscious *prima materia* in the surrealist “object,” occultists already looked to a metaphysical “consciousness of Being” as the “white tincture which the adept distils from his human form in the alembic of the mind.”³⁰ As orthodox psychoanalysis continued in the post-war period to try to shake itself free of any association with the occult, both surrealists and occultists grasped its potential as a fellow traveler on the path of self-realization.

In Britain after the war an interest in the occult and psychoanalysis often went hand in hand, and some of those who had been involved with social issues and occultism over a decade earlier were among the earliest Freudian enthusiasts. A. R. Orage’s *New Age* reflected both his renewed regard for the occult and a growing interest in psychoanalysis, and Orage brought together some of the intellectuals and writers of his circle in a “psycho-synthesis” group formed to develop a new kind of spiritualized psychology. Among those who participated were Havelock Ellis; David Eder, who had read a paper on psychoanalysis to a hostile British Medical Association before the war; Maurice Nicoll, who had Theosophical connections; and James Young. Both Nicoll and Young were doctors who had studied with Carl Jung. G. R. S. Mead, once Madame Blavatsky’s private secretary, also became interested in psychoanalysis, and a working relationship developed between participants in Orage’s psychosynthesis group and Mead’s Quest Society. There were also links between these groups and Theosophists, who were interested in psychoanalysis but rejected what they took to be an overly materialist emphasis on sex. Theosophists (and other occultists like Aleister Crowley) tended to think that Freud had “discovered” nothing that had not been known for centuries by occultists and teachers in the East, but this interest in the relationship between spirituality and consciousness nevertheless created a revitalized climate of esoteric inquiry. Within a few short years of the armistice the intellectual ground had been prepared for a new phase in the development of a psychology of self-realization.

The new dispensation arrived in the early 1920s in the persons of Pyötr Demianovitch Ouspensky and Georgei Ivanovitch Gurdjieff. Gurdjieff was a charismatic teacher with a mysterious pedigree in the tradition of Madame Blavatsky. Probably born in the 1870s, Gurdjieff had a Greek father and an Armenian mother, and grew up in Caucasia—an area over which Turkey, Russia, and Persia had disputed claims. There were persistent rumors that Gurdjieff had been a Tsarist agent in Tibet, and he was certainly widely traveled and knowledgeable about the mystical traditions emphasized by

Blavatsky as well as those of Central Asia. Like Blavatsky, Gurdjieff lacked social polish but was possessed of a powerful persona and great personal magnetism. It seems that he also possessed psychic powers, but Gurdjieff's message was centrally concerned with the potentialities of human consciousness. In particular, he taught that human beings conventionally operate in a condition akin to the sleeping state; that our "real" consciousness is located in the subconscious, and that in order to realize our full potential we must, in effect, wake up. As expressed by his early exponent, Pyotr Demianovitch Ouspensky, Gurdjieff taught a "psychology of man's possible evolution," which stressed the limitations of our mechanical everyday selves and the significance of the "I" of complete realization.³¹ Reminiscent of the teachings within the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and those of Annie Besant and others within the Theosophical Society, this is a message that found immediate resonance in the postwar circles surrounding A. R. Orage. By the time Ouspensky arrived in London in 1921 to begin promulgating Gurdjieff's ideas, there was already a buzz in the air. Lady Rothermere, wife of the press baron, was spreading the word about Ouspensky's own esoteric opus *Tertium Organum*, which had recently been translated into English, and G. R. S. Mead had become interested in his ideas about the fourth dimension. Orage, who had met Ouspensky briefly before the war and maintained contact with him during the chaotic aftermath of the revolution in Russia, immediately set about publicizing Ouspensky's visit and its purpose.³²

P. D. Ouspensky, a cultivated Russian, had met Gurdjieff in Moscow in 1915 and subsequently helped him set up a small colony of like-minded individuals in the central Caucasus. Gurdjieff was in Germany when Ouspensky arrived in London, and as Ouspensky addressed audiences garnered from the Quest Society, the psychosynthesis group, breakaway Theosophists, and others of the Orage circle it became clear that he had come to impart Gurdjieff's ideas rather than take part in an exchange of esoteric views. His message was essentially that of Gurdjieff's: we must confront the illusory nature of the "I" of the personality and work to develop and know the "real I." In short, Ouspensky taught that the seeker must become part of a group dedicated to waking up.

There were high hopes that such a group might be formed in London, but despite pressure applied in high places, the British authorities refused to allow Gurdjieff's Russian entourage to enter the country. Instead, Gurdjieff moved his group to Paris. He established his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at a château near Fontainebleau, some forty miles outside the city, with money raised by Ouspensky's British friends and pupils. Among the first to join him in France were the analysts James Young

and Maurice Nicoll; Rosamund Sharp, who had family connections to the old Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (she was the daughter of E. Nesbit's husband, Hubert Bland); A. R. Orage; and, famously, the young writer Katherine Mansfield.³³ Aleister Crowley was an unwelcome visitor. In all, there were some sixty or seventy inhabitants, at least half of whom came from central Europe. The regime was tough. Gurdjieff's system relied upon hard manual labor conducted in spartan surroundings, combined with highly disciplined physical and mental exercises designed to break the habitual patterns of the sleeping state. The institute accepted only selected students, some of whom were characterized as patients. Its early prospectus, mainly written by Ouspensky, spoke of Gurdjieff's "psychological system" as the "Psychology of man's inner development" and the "Science of the harmonious development of man."³⁴

As synthesized by Ouspensky, psychology for Gurdjieff is "the study of the possible evolution of man" and "the study of oneself." Gurdjieff was promoting a form of psychology that harked back to the old schools of wisdom; that is, psychology as a "forgotten science" that was immediately recognizable to those familiar with fin-de-siècle occultism. Crucially, he was interested in "self-consciousness" as "a particular kind of 'awareness' in man . . . first of all, *awareness of himself*, awareness of *who he is*," and saw this in terms of the kind of self-realization privileged by advanced occultists. Like occultists, too, Gurdjieff argued that "consciousness can be made continuous and controllable by special efforts and special study." Such "special study," Gurdjieff and Ouspensky argued, can only take place in schools devoted to the development of "man's possible evolution."³⁵ The Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man outside Fontainebleau was such a school. Here Gurdjieff, unpredictable, demanding, blunt to the point of rudeness, reigned supreme; he was in every sense the Master. Gurdjieff expected his students to assume their studies and work with the utmost dedication, and in return he presided over the Study House and devised an environment in which everything (even the smallest detail of manual labor) acquired meaning. Tasks were individually assigned, often to the least likely candidate. There was little comfort, physical or otherwise. Complacency was not an option. For those who survived the regime, the institute offered a glimpse of a life stripped of compromise and lived at a heightened level of concentrated intensity. In some senses it was reminiscent of the kind of Magical Retirement favored by Aleister Crowley: the material and cosmological details were different, but the sought-after effect was essentially the same. Gurdjieff's system was designed to break down the barriers that prevent full disclosure of the self in all its dimensions.

The institute, however, was not for everyone. James Young took a long hard look at Gurdjieff and decided to leave. He was disturbed by the faithful's unquestioning acceptance of Gurdjieff's mastery, and left the institute following a disagreement with Gurdjieff over a medical diagnosis. P. D. Ouspensky was himself unable to stomach too much undiluted Gurdjieff, and on his return to London early in 1924 announced his intention of operating independently. A. R. Orage, on the other hand, who completely severed his London ties in order to join Gurdjieff in France, remained. It was partly through his influence that Gurdjieff's institute and ideas became the talk of avant-garde literary salons and circles on both sides of the Atlantic. Opinions of the Master and his system, of course, varied. W. B. Yeats warned against entanglement, D. H. Lawrence was vitriolic but nevertheless visited the institute, Gertrude Stein met Gurdjieff, as did Ezra Pound.

But the transatlantic conversation developed an entirely new dimension when A. R. Orage traveled to New York in late 1923 in order to prepare the ground for Gurdjieff, who arrived early the next year in the company of a large entourage. Orage's lectures in New York attracted a diverse and interesting group, while Gurdjieff's staged presentation of the exercises and sacred dances that were so much a part of life at the institute electrified audiences. Orage remained in New York after Gurdjieff's departure, and his influence was widely felt in the literary groups that revolved around the celebrated writer Waldo Frank. This circle in some ways replicated the kind of intellectual climate that had proven highly amenable to Ouspensky in London, and Orage made some significant converts. Among them were Jane Heap, who with Margaret Anderson edited *The Little Review*, and the novelist Jean Toomer. Both Heap and Toomer became serious students of Gurdjieff, and Toomer became a leading spokesperson for the system that Gurdjieff termed the Work. Through Jean Toomer, Gurdjieff's ideas filtered into the group of writers and artists that were central to what was to become known as the Harlem Renaissance.³⁶

In 1924 Gurdjieff announced without warning that he was closing the institute, which was henceforth referred to as Le Prieuré, and Orage began what amounted to a second career as a teacher of Gurdjieff's ideas in the United States. He finally broke with the Master in 1931, when Gurdjieff virtually dismissed him after he had become something of an oracular force in his own right. Orage returned to Britain, where he resumed a literary career similar to the one he had abandoned a decade earlier. Gurdjieff, meanwhile, set about gathering up Orage's American pupils and followers. Orage died only a few years later, in 1934, but there was little sense that he regretted his years with Gurdjieff. In fact, rather the contrary. Ouspensky, for his part,

continued to teach, and formed a close association with Maurice Nicoll, who had returned to Britain after the closure of the institute in France. In the years that followed, Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, and Nicoll continued to lead productive lives teaching some version of the Work, and a variety of centers dedicated to different aspects of Gurdjieff's system eventually sprang up in the United States and Britain. The three men died within several years of each other—Ouspensky in 1947, Gurdjieff in 1949, and Nicoll in 1953—while the ideas they espoused were revised and found a completely new audience during the next great occult revival of the 1960s and 1970s.

The renewed appeal of the Work requires little translation. Both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky were influenced by Victorian and Edwardian occultism, but they extrapolated some of its central insights to formulate what their interpreters considered a new approach to self-realization. In particular, Gurdjieff and Ouspensky developed and taught a systematic “psychology” that sought to address the dilemmas of modern existence while drawing on the wisdom traditions of the past. This was a system with its roots in occultism, but one that spoke in a more immediately modern voice. Not least, the Work of the fin-de-siècle occultists had become the new “psychology” of a postwar generation.

The so-called new psychology offered a structured and disciplined blueprint for life as it is lived in a “disenchanted” world, and addressed familiar issues of meaning and existence in a language partially stripped of arcane reference. It is small wonder that Gurdjieff appealed to a man like Maurice Nicoll, the doctor who had previously worked with Jung and who exemplified precisely that modern man in search of a soul of whom Jung spoke. That the new psychology of the Gurdjieff school bears more than a passing resemblance to Jungian analytical psychology is again no accident. Gurdjieff and Jung were steeped in some of the same occult literatures, ancient and modern. Indeed, Gurdjieff's ideas came so close to those of Jung that it was thought that the two men must have met—something that Jung apparently denied.³⁷ In other ways, of course, they were very different. Quite apart from all other considerations, Gurdjieff established himself in the tradition of an occult Master in a way that Jung did not. Gurdjieff the man as well as his mythologized persona were steeped in a magical aura. He was often referred to by his followers as a magician, and the powerful effect of his hypnotic presence is reminiscent of Aleister Crowley in his prime. Although Gurdjieff despised Crowley, both men were undeniably occult Masters in a similar mold. And if Jung was clearly not a magician in the same sense, he certainly provided a framework for thinking about what the designation “magician” might mean in modern terms. James Young, ruminating on the

Gurdjieff that he could no longer support, noted: "I could not but be impressed by the power which accrues to a man once he has been invested with the magical attributes of the 'all-powerful father' or has had the 'magician' archetype projected into him, as Jung would say."³⁸

The "magician" archetype was, and remains, a powerful signifier. Leaving aside the idea of the psychoanalyst as a modern magician, it is not difficult to understand the allure of the all-knowing, all-powerful diviner of universal secrets. As the cases of Crowley and Gurdjieff so amply illustrate, educated and gifted women and men will sacrifice a very great deal in the name of an occult Master who claims access to ultimate truths. When that Master can also offer the prospect of enchantment in the disenchanted language of the secularized self, we have at hand the formula for the creation of a modern magician of mythic proportions. Self-knowledge, particularly when that self is accorded potentially divine status, is a compelling ideal. But that is not all there is to it. Even those of us who have no desire to enter the internalized world of self-realization, secular or otherwise, are hardly immune from the blandishments of enchantment. The boundaries between the enchanted and disenchanted worlds are not secure, and we habitually unknowingly engage in magical ways of thinking.³⁹ To look for symbolic import and meaningful connections in the otherwise random events of life seems to be an integral element of the human condition. Further, in the absence of a satisfyingly integrated worldview, we seem compelled to create new myths within which to live. If the occultism detailed in the pages of this book constitutes just such a myth, we should not assume that the postmodern moment is immune. Systems of the kind devised by the Victorian occultists and their heirs are no longer in intellectual vogue, but the current disinclination for master narratives is matched by the surety that we can uncover their design and read their secrets. We perhaps inhabit a new myth in which we once again assume that we can move from the exoteric to the occult, but have exchanged the Book of Nature for that of Culture.

The Place of Enchantment has itself been conceived within the later twentieth-century context of a broad intellectual shift within the disciplines, one that questions Enlightenment ideals of order and rationality and promotes the importance of the extraordinary and apparently marginal for understanding cultural norms.⁴⁰ These concerns have been influential for the development of the new cultural history, but while they have certainly been a factor in the conceptualization of the present book they have not driven its argument.⁴¹ In so many ways fin-de-siècle occultism, when taken seriously and on its own terms, speaks for itself. My intention here has been in part to elucidate occultism as a modern phenomenon with its own critique of Enlight-

enment rationality, and I have sought above all to demonstrate and press the claims for the often subtle ways in which the occult was itself intrinsic to the making of the modern at the turn of the century. But if occultism was intimately bound up in the cultural configuration of the modern, then the modern was equally characterized by some of the very tensions that occult subjectivity sought to incorporate and enchantment to mediate. In the following concluding chapter I reflect on the wider ramifications of a culture of enchantment for the modern period, and consider some of the most influential social theory of the twentieth century in a discursive reading of occultism as symptomatic of the ambiguities of modernity.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Occultism and the Ambiguities of the Modern

The newly imagined self proposed by fin-de-siècle occultism was formulated in relation to some of the leading dilemmas of modern existence. The inadequacies of a life stripped of any meaningful spiritual component, the perceived threat to individual and aesthetic autonomy posed by a developing mass culture, the dependence of modes of modern rationality on a particular characterization and positioning of the irrational: each worked to engender a resistant—but also, in key respects, accommodating—version of occult subjectivity. One of the central arguments of *The Place of Enchantment* is that this occult subjectivity was located at the interstices of disenchanted preoccupations and modes of inquiry. As such, it called upon secularized strategies of self-construction in pursuit of spiritualized goals. At the same time, although occultism was predicated on the belief that it is possible to uncover and codify the laws that govern human existence, it also questioned the kind of rationality that such a codification might be assumed to require. The fin-de-siècle occult was born of and integral to a broader European cultural climate in which a newly forged “breath of spirit” sought an uneasy alliance with emerging critiques of rationality. Occultists refused to understand the relationship between reason and reality in conventional terms, arguing instead that in their post-Enlightenment incarnations both concepts were fatally flawed. And, as we have seen, occultism was caught up in a series of ambiguities. Not least of these was that it was implicated in a critique of the autonomy of reason even as it reaffirmed a nineteenth-century faith in both reason and progress.

So if Holbrook Jackson’s classic formulation of the 1890s as the decade that witnessed “the beginning of the revival of mysticism” has withstood the test of time, as I suggest at the outset of the previous chapter, to what extent was he right to couple this “revival” with “the beginning of the revolt against

rationalism"?¹ Was the "revival," as Jackson suggested, synonymous with such a "revolt"? The short answer is "yes," if by rationalism we understand a commitment to the strict application of empirical methods and requirement of scientific proofs in relation to the phenomena of religious experience. Those involved with the "mystical" revival abhorred the brutal interventions of an unheeding positivist coterie in delicate questions of the soul or Higher Self. At the same time, though, occultists adhered to a system of belief entirely regulated by reason. Occult cosmology was itself highly systematized, and the practical occultist's skill lay in the ability to understand, negotiate, and control these otherly realms. Occultism was often represented as a science, and occultists played by the straightforward rule that specific magical procedures produce predictable and specified results. This is what characterizes magic, even the fin-de-siècle psychologized magic conducted in modes of higher consciousness.

Where occultists parted company with positivism was in its formulation of reason. It argued for the creative partnership of intuition and reason, acknowledging the role of imagination in practical magic and pushing the boundaries of the real beyond anything that might be empirically verified by the noninitiate. All of this meant that, while occultism blurred the distinctions between "rational" and "irrational," occultists themselves epitomized an unbending faith in rationality worthy of any Victorian proponent of scientific naturalism. They argued for the rationalist modernity of a theory and practice that refuted the concept of the supernatural and looked instead to the natural world for explanations of all things noumenal: "Whatever forces may be latent in the Universe at large or in man in particular, they are wholly natural . . . the superhuman, Yes; the supernatural, No."²

In this sense the occultists at the turn of the century were the children of late nineteenth-century modernity. They were in thrall to an Enlightenment insistence on the supremacy of human reason even though they challenged dominant definitions of reason, and were similarly sympathetic to the possibilities of a worldview in which religious superstition is abandoned for a reasoned if spiritually enlightened self-knowledge. Theirs was a thoroughly modern project, albeit one with presentiments of the postmodern critique of reason. It is just this critique, of course, that is generally associated with the central ethos of postmodernism. In the work of Michel Foucault it takes the form of a historically based argument in which he suggests that the knowledge we have come to call the human sciences, and the systems (juridical, penal, medical, and so on) through which it is institutionalized, produces the very human subject that it purports to investigate and represent. This argument is underwritten by Foucault's insistence on the historicity of the En-

lightenment concept of autonomous reason, and his rejection of reason's claims to universality and thus objectivity.³ Elsewhere postmodernism is characterized by what Jean-Francois Lyotard has summed up as "incredulity toward metanarratives."⁴ It is this "incredulity" towards the great overarching story lines of the Enlightenment project—be they organizational concepts such as "society" or "class," or value systems based on universalizing assumptions like "truth" and "justice"—that lies at the heart of a postmodern dedication to undermining the certainties (some would add: colonizing tyrannies) of what is "known."⁵

And this, in spite of certain similarities, is what distinguishes the postmodern position from that of turn-of-the-century occultists, who subscribed without hesitation to the idea of ultimate truths that can be known as well as the concept of an objectively verifiable real, and whose beliefs were formulated around a highly structured narrative of spiritual organization and purpose. It is also what distinguishes a postmodern intellectual standpoint from that of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century innovators in the human sciences. Max Weber and Sigmund Freud, to take two such leading exemplars, were acutely aware of the ironies of the Enlightenment project and exposed to severe scrutiny its promises and assumptions. Similarly, they were each in their different ways concerned with the relationship between cultural formation and the distinctively modern concept of reason as subjective self-consciousness. But even as they explored the relativism of the Western rational order (Weber) and undermined the notion of the stable subject upon which that order depends (Freud), they held fast both methodologically and conceptually to a belief in the ultimate authority of reason. It is this acceptance of the Enlightenment insistence on the sovereignty of reason that distinguishes those great modernists from postmodernists, who insist that because the modern concept of reason is itself contingent its operations are necessarily compromised. The struggle today over whether or not an acknowledgment of cultural relativism implies the acceptance of cognitive relativism is being fought out on the terrain of postmodernism, but this debate has necessitated a return on both sides to the promulgators of modern thought at the turn of the century.⁶

Critical to this return are the related issues of the self-contradictions of the rational subject and the apparent failure of reason to provide a universal basis for moral-value judgments. It is in particular the palpable failure of Enlightenment reason to ensure human emancipation, and its inability to provide the ultimate grounding for societal values and norms, that so exercised Max Weber.⁷ For Weber, the Enlightenment's faith in the progressive potential of science and rationality was misplaced. He argued that far from

the liberation envisaged by Enlightenment thinkers, what has been bequeathed to the modern era is the imprisoning straitjacket of a *Zweckrationalität*, purposive or instrumental rationality. This characterization of the apotheosis of Enlightenment reason was itself bound up with what Weber called “rationalization” and the related emergence of specific cultural values. Weber uses the concept of rationalization in a variety of different ways throughout his work, but in general it relates to the ways in which different modes of Western rationality came to be expressed in and through the organization of social and cultural life. Weber viewed rationalization as a self-perpetuating process that is intrinsic to modernity and encompasses everything from the emergence of the modern state, with its attendant bureaucratic structures, to the development of specific conceptual modes in the fine arts. Most important, Weber argued that instrumental rationality and the rationalization of society has created a fearful “iron cage” of bureaucratization, which incorporates its own logic of authority and repression. More broadly understood, the triumph of reason and “progress” has been achieved at terrible cost.⁸

Weber’s analysis of modernity has become the focus of commentary throughout the twentieth century. Susceptible to appropriation by both conservative thinkers and Marxist intellectuals, his ideas about the systematization of rationality and the rationalization of authority proved influential across the political spectrum as well as central to much American interwar social science. Weberian theory was refined and modified during the course of its application in different domains, but within the revisionist Marxist Frankfurt School Weber’s assessment of the Enlightenment legacy was revisited with particular urgency as the European events of the 1930s and 1940s unfolded.⁹ In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argued that there could be no social freedom without enlightened thought, but equally considered that the Enlightenment contained within itself its own seeds of destruction. In the face of Stalinism and the rise of fascism, European society seemed the very antithesis of all that was rational—and yet for Horkheimer and Adorno totalitarianism, like anti-Semitism, was simply a playing out of the internal dynamics of Enlightenment thought and values. Each represented an elaboration of the Enlightenment’s underlying logic of domination, whether of “man” or nature. Horkheimer and Adorno referred to this as “the self-destruction of the Enlightenment.” In a message that anticipated the self-critiquing argument of Jürgen Habermas, Horkheimer and Adorno stressed that “the Enlightenment *must consider itself*.”¹⁰ At the root of these theories of modernity as they emerged during the first half of the twentieth century, then, was the idea

that the unreflective purposive-instrumental rationality of the Enlightenment project was ultimately self-defeating. This was summed up at many levels by Horkheimer and Adorno when they noted tersely that the “program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world.”¹¹

The reference to “disenchantment” was a direct acknowledgment of Weber’s pessimistic assessment of the modern age. According to Weber, the disenchanted modern age is one in which an all-embracing metaphysical or religious worldview falls victim to the same process of rationalization that had earlier created it. Furthermore, this has cognitive as well as ethical implications. Disenchantment implies the emergence of a particular structure of consciousness developed in accordance with the secularizing logic of the rationalizing process. This modern consciousness is characterized by an instrumental reason that can only disavow that which does not accord with its own conceptual dictates. As Weber’s Marxist interpreters put it, what “appears to be the triumph of subjective rationality, the subjection of all reality to logical formalism, is paid for by the obedient subjection of reason to what is directly given.”¹² So that in a de-sacralized modern age the principle of transcendence and the ontological realities of a religious worldview are exchanged for a subject-centered immanence and the realities of a rational-scientific universe. By this reckoning, scientific rationality becomes simultaneously the only legitimate means of interpreting the world and the sole arbiter of objective world meaning. It is for this reason that Weber regarded science not as the antithesis of religion but as itself a religion.¹³ Similarly, Adorno and Horkheimer argued that in its efforts to free the world of fallacy and superstition the Enlightenment has succeeded only in replacing one myth with another. Instead of an all-powerful God, an enlightened world assumes the sovereignty of “man.” This sovereignty in turn consists of “man’s” power to know and thereby control nature. But herein also lies a great paradox: “the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant.”¹⁴

This paradox was in part what Adorno and Horkheimer took on in their idea of the “dialectic” of the Enlightenment. Freedom from the thrall of religious superstition merely substitutes one form of power relations for another. The domination of the natural world by “man” is simultaneously an alienation from nature and a dehumanization of the ways in which we conceive of ourselves and relate to others. It is this dehumanization that Georg Lukács had earlier referred to as “reification,” and Habermas suggests that Marxists from Lukács to Adorno consistently interpreted Weber’s theory of the rationalization of society as a reification of consciousness.¹⁵ One way of putting this was to say that pre-Enlightenment animism “spiritualizes the object, whereas industrialism objectifies the spirits of men.” Further, that

“with the objectification of spirit, the very relations of men—even those of the individual to himself—were bewitched.” Thus, in an enlightened rationalized society the powerful spirits of an earlier age have given way to demons of a different kind. Human relationships and subjective consciousness have assumed a “demonically distorted form,” one ruled by the principles of reification and domination. The kind of power dynamic inherent in magic and superstition has been transposed into “the indefatigable self-destructiveness of enlightenment” and the slide of “mankind . . . into a new kind of barbarism.”¹⁶

The hope, at least as Horkheimer expressed it during the final years of the Second World War, lay in the reconciliation of “objective reason” (the kind of rationalization and associated ethical values expressed in traditional religious worldviews) and the instrumentalized “subjective reason” closely identified with self-interest and privileged by Weber in his analysis of modernity. In an argument to which Habermas has returned, Horkheimer insisted that the reconciliation of these seemingly oppositional concepts of reason relies on the readiness of reason to critique itself. It equally involves an acknowledgment of the “trend to domination” inherent in subjective reason and recognition of the ways in which this gets played out through an antagonistic and alienated relationship with the natural world. Horkheimer stressed the impossibility and undesirability of repressing the tendency of the self (his term) to aspire to “the idea of something transcending the subjectivity of self-interest,” and proposed the relevance of the idea that “an all-embracing or fundamental structure of being could be discovered and a conception of destiny derived from it.” He seems to come remarkably close here to a religious formulation, and was later to comment on the underlying religious theme in the Frankfurt School’s materialism. Horkheimer was enough of a Marxist, however, to view this principle of transcendence, “structure of being,” and “conception of destiny” in social rather than explicitly religious terms. Drawing on a philosophical tradition of objective reason, with its claims to the concept of objective truth, he had in mind the ultimate reconciliation of transcendence and subjective self-interest in a “supra-individual order, that is to say . . . social solidarity.”¹⁷

Horkheimer’s proposal for the reconciliation of objective and subjective reason as a solution to the problem of disenchantment stressed the complementary importance of instrumental reason and the kind of unifying worldview that Weber associated with traditional religion. He argued for the apotheosis of self-critiquing reason as a subjective calculating rationality with ultimate reference to the transcendent truth of “an all-embracing . . . structure of being.” For all this apparent appeal to a religious sensibility,

though, neither Horkheimer nor Weber sought to press the claims of traditional religion in a modern age. Indeed, both were suggesting in their different ways that modernity is characterized by the impossibility of getting that particular genie back into the lamp. For both men the problem of disenchantment is bound up with the history of modern consciousness, whose very structure now militates against the possibility of shared and unquestioning religious belief. It is the dominance of an instrumental rationality in conjunction with the rationalizing process that first created the kind of subject-centered Protestantism which so interested Weber. But by dint of the same logic these processes have been instrumental in replacing a unifying religious worldview governed by a divine transcendental principle with a free-floating, subject-centered order in which there are no socially integrative moral and ethical guarantees. According to the dictates of instrumental rationality, faith has in the modern age become a question of subjective belief without external referent or claims to truth.

The problem of disenchantment as identified by Weber and Horkheimer was discussed by them within the framework of the dominant model of modern subjectivity, and indeed both men were representative of the modern disenchanted subject they described. Both Weber and Horkheimer accepted the Cartesian model of reason as rational self-consciousness, and Horkheimer elaborated on the theme of instrumental reason as intrinsic to the structure of modern consciousness. Neither man thought that a return to an archaic enchanted world was possible or acceptable, and Horkheimer looked instead to a philosophy of consciousness for answers. If the problem is the modern subject, the argument runs, the resolution must lie in adjudicating the rational self-consciousness through which that subject is constituted. This is the point at which Habermas parts company with the Frankfurt School, but the validity or otherwise of the prescription is not at issue here.¹⁸ What is important is that the model of subjectivity to which Weber and the early members of the Frankfurt School subscribed, and the deep-seated ambivalence towards the rationality of the self-authenticating modern subject that their analyses disclose, are themselves emblematic of the crisis of subjectivity as it was experienced at the turn of the century. Although it was not conceived in this way, or under precisely the same historical circumstances, the contradictions disclosed by modernity towards the end of the nineteenth century produced a similar set of anxieties about what it means to be human in the modern world. This was the climate, after all, out of which Weber's work emerged. For many, the final decade of the old century seemed to mark the moment at which the modern subject was fi-

nally cut adrift from its traditional moorings and the aporias of modernity as we know it were born.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the world-historical process of modernization that Weber called rationalization had apparently secured the emergence of a secular subject within a largely secularized culture. While this did not necessarily mean the erosion of individual religious faith per se, it did signal the accomplishment of a modern separation of reason and faith, the appearance at the heart of intellectual life of a self-enlightened critique of religious belief, and a serious decline in the power and centrality of organized religion. Intrinsic to these developments was the rise of positivism, a continuation of Enlightenment thought that discounted traditional theology or metaphysics as mere speculation and insisted instead on a model of rational discourse and of reality itself characterized by the systematized standards of the positive sciences. Weber argued that these processes in turn suggested the demise of a shared religious worldview with its transcendent ideals and associated ethical values, and pointed instead to an increasingly subject-centered moral universe. Much of this added up to the now-familiar picture of Weberian disenchantment with its central figure, the rational secularized subject. This was an individual whose religious proclivities and ethical attitudes, while related to cultural norms and subject to social sanction, were nevertheless increasingly a matter of private conscience. The range of available conventional religious beliefs remained broad, but the individual response to the claims of religion could no longer be assumed. Belief had become intensely personalized, and for some had disappeared altogether.

Rationalism and its attendant concept of reason played the dominant role in this shift. In its Enlightenment incarnation, particularly as expressed in the evolutionary and scientific perspective of nineteenth-century positivism, it was no longer possible for reason to engage as it once had in the production of religious knowledge. Faith was (as always) a requirement of belief, but faith was now a deeply subjective personal domain largely evacuated by reason in its knowledge-producing, proof-demanding empiricist mode. During the second half of the nineteenth century many thousands of women and men became spiritualist believers precisely because spiritualism did not demand faith, but instead offered actual demonstration and thus objective "proof" of its claims. Occultism, and particularly magic, operated in a similar vein. Alternatively there were those whose beliefs slipped quietly away, unmourned, a logical consequence of reason's seemingly superior sway. Others abandoned altogether the traditional concerns of metaphysics and theology and instead sought fulfillment in a positivist Comtean religion

of humanity and reason. Still more undoubtedly held in some measure to orthodox religious beliefs, if not explicit celebration of them, while acknowledging that this was a question of faith rather than a position arrived at through rational calculation. But common to each of these positions was the separation of reason and faith that characterized the modern subject, and the related implied acceptance of the “natural” dominion of reason as manifested in the nineteenth-century interpretation of both the rationalist and nonrationalist traditions.¹⁹

There were, however, different currents at work towards the end of the century that both confirmed and undermined the sovereignty of rational subjectivity; and while these developments did nothing to dent the status of rationality as the *sine qua non* of the normative human being, they did constitute an adjustment to an Enlightenment model of rationality and autonomous rational “man.” H. Stuart Hughes has argued in *Consciousness and Society* that the 1890s saw the beginning of an “intellectual revolution,” which had at its heart “the problem of consciousness.” Hughes was primarily concerned with the issue of subjectivity in the human sciences, and the book deals with what he identified as the revolt against “the cult of positivism.” He suggests that the positivism against which certain writers directed themselves was broadly taken to mean “the whole tendency to discuss human behavior in terms of analogies drawn from natural science,” and proposes the 1890s as “the period in which the subjective attitude of the observer of society first thrust itself forward in peremptory fashion.” In Hughes’s analysis, the final decade of the century constituted a pivotal moment in the development of social theory. It was the decade during which a creative generation of social thinkers began to attack the accepted notion of “an identity of view between actor and observer in the social process,” and first recognized the significance of “subjective ‘values.’” Hughes argues that the acknowledgment that human behavior is influenced by more than simply “logical considerations,” that this applies equally to the social actor and scientific observer, and that it has clear ramifications for the study of society led to “an enormous heightening of intellectual self-consciousness—a wholesale re-examination of the presuppositions of social thought itself. ‘Seeing through’—probing in depth—these are the hallmarks of early twentieth-century thinking.”²⁰

In one sense what Hughes calls “the new self-consciousness” raised the stakes for rationality by further elevating the concept of the autonomous human subject as the supreme source of meaning and value. Equally, however, the probing of a “newly recognized disparity between external reality and the internal appreciation of that reality,” which for Hughes characterized

the new intellectual trends of the 1890s, disclosed deep-seated contradictions surrounding the issues of rationality and the self-conscious modern subject.²¹ For at the very moment that the triumph of rational subjectivity was finally secured, as exemplified by the Weberian disenchanted figure, questions were raised about the ontology of human consciousness, the place of the nonrational in human action, and the authenticity of reason's effects. And it was in this same moment that the irrational, or that which refuses the logic of rationality, emerged as an object of study and a cause for either concern or celebration. Here, at the turn of the century, it was proposed that there is an irrational dimension to human consciousness and existence that it is the task of rationality to systematize and understand—if only to point up the ultimate frailty of rational understanding.

Towards the end of the century, then, a select group of European social theorists, medical psychologists, and philosophers began to turn their attention to the seemingly irrational realm of human ideas and impulses that defy the dictates of rational intent and conscious organization. The 1890s were the years during which the coherence and rationality of the “ego,” the “I” of personal consciousness, were increasingly called into doubt. At the same time, a renewed social critique leveled at the dehumanization and standardization of life in advanced industrial society drew in diverse and complex ways on the irrationality of advanced capitalism as promoted by Marx and his later interpreters. So, too, as we have seen, a European *Lebensphilosophie* connected with men like Friedrich Nietzsche, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Henri Bergson emerged, which constituted a modern reworking of the Romantic tradition, and stood in stark contrast with the presumptions of abstract rationalism and the disillusionment of disenchantment.²²

A European “philosophy of life” can be understood (as Horkheimer was later to argue) as an outraged response to the anomie of modern life, but it equally constituted a reasoned rebuttal to the strictures of positivism.²³ What these very different understandings of the irrational—as the unconscious and its motivations, the internal inconsistencies of modern social and economic systems, and irrationalism itself—have in common is that they each seem to point to a perceived disjuncture between the Enlightenment assumption that rationalism speaks for all that is human and necessary and a new sense that the irrational is intrinsic both to modernity and the modern subject. The new engagement with the irrational signified an acknowledgment of the dilemmas of modernity that was itself coterminous with a new understanding of subjectivity at the turn of the century.

The optimistic claims for rationality made by the Enlightenment philosophers, and the model of autonomous subjectivity upon which those claims

were predicated, now seemed to be thrown into doubt. It was this doubt, and perhaps in particular a sense of the alienation of consciousness from itself, that was to become synonymous with what it means to be undeniably “modern.” So that in this moment of high modernity at the close of the century, reason was subjected to a critique that foreclosed certain Enlightenment assumptions about its purchase and potential even as its normative capabilities were reaffirmed. Indeed, while rationality retained its normative connotations, the new intellectual trends of the day assumed a rather different human subject from that imagined by Enlightenment thinkers, and presented the irrational in a modern rationalized light. But the last redoubt of unqualified Enlightenment reason, the association of religion with myth and superstition, seemed secure. If individual women and men retained their religious beliefs, they apparently did so at the behest of faith alone. Religion might be assigned a social value but safely consigned to the domain of the irrational without fear of rehabilitation.

Here, though, is where a problem presents itself. For in the realm of religiosity, too, the concept of reason was critiqued, reformulated, and given new value by a generation of occultists intent on claiming reason in its knowledge-producing mode as the necessary counterpart to a spiritual experience that did not rely upon faith alone. In particular, the upsurge of interest in heterodox spirituality at the end of the century was intimately bound up with a newly envisaged modern subjectivity, one that acknowledged the place and importance of the personal irrational, and represented a reworking of the idea of reason that was both a response to and a measure of a Weberian disenchanted modernity.

By Holbrook Jackson’s reckoning, “the unsatisfied spirit of the age” looked beyond established moral codes and the restrictive practices of rationalism for answers to ongoing questions about life’s meaning and purpose. The solutions proposed by occultism were contradictory. They involved a fully fledged engagement with consciousness in all its dimensions that was symptomatic of but did not reproduce the concerns of the human sciences, and the elaboration of a modern subject-centered immanence that nevertheless relied for its legitimacy on a rationalized cosmology and assertion of an objectively verifiable (if spiritualized) real. Occultism in fact represented the apotheosis of the sovereignty of the self—a self that did not recognize the relativism of its own self-reflexivity, and that could therefore confidently assume its rightful place as lord of the universe. In so doing, occultism, and especially practical occultism, took an Enlightenment imperative to know and thus control the natural world to new heights. Not only was personal consciousness in all its complexity posited as knowable, it was also deemed

the route to knowledge of and power over the great occluded dominions of nontemporal reality. Similarly, the lucid cognition of the boundless “kingdom within” was a mere hair’s breadth from an assertion of personal divinity. The ambitious reach of the occult endeavor was fantastic, perhaps even frightening. The will to power that Adorno and Horkheimer associated so closely with Enlightenment rationalism is implicit; the threat to personal integrity, particularly if the safeguards were not observed, manifest. Both were writ large in the career of Aleister Crowley. The unexamined problem that lay at the heart of fin-de-siècle occultism is that it rewrote the rules of engagement with the self. Occultism opened up the unconscious to rational self-exploration in an attempt to know the unknowable in a way that exemplified the logic of Enlightenment reason and its dynamic of colonization and control.

At the turn of the century, when occultism in Britain was often closely tied to progressive politics and a benign spiritual worldview, the problems implicit in occult rationalizations lay in abeyance. For the moment the occult goal of creating a new “race” of “supermen” who would work towards the “regeneration” of the planet seemed harmless enough. There were warning signs, but nothing yet to suggest that “the fully enlightened earth” might radiate “disaster triumphant.”²⁴ H. Stuart Hughes, however, writing four decades after Holbrook Jackson, could not be so sure that fin-de-siècle “mysticism” did not carry with it connotations of a destructive irrationalism. Throughout his discussion of what he called the recovery of the unconscious, Hughes tends to elide the terms *unconscious* and *irrational*, arguing that “the problem of irrational motivation in human conduct” in a broader sense marked the work of “the major intellectual innovators of the 1890s.” “They were obsessed,” he states, “almost intoxicated, with a rediscovery of the nonlogical, the uncivilized, the inexplicable.” This characterization of the intellectual project of the 1890s is in itself revealing, but Hughes’s explicit agenda was to defend the “great” social theorists with whom he was concerned (and Freud and Weber undoubtedly headed the list) against charges of “irrationalism.” They were, he insists, “concerned with the irrational only to exorcise it . . . to tame it, to canalize it for constructive human purposes.” Furthermore, Hughes felt obliged to dispense with the view that a preoccupation with unconscious or irrational motivation might signal an incipient “neo-romanticism or neo-mysticism.” Such categorization, he suggests, fitted only a very few “minor figures” like Charles Péguy or Carl Jung. Hughes argues that the sociologist Émile Durkheim was more representative in protesting (possibly with Bergson in mind) what he called the “‘renascent mysticism’” among social theorists.²⁵

Hughes's discussion, of course, was shaped by his own position as a post-war scholar. Writing during the 1950s, he was highly sensitive to what he saw as the perils of the "new self-consciousness" and suggested that there are potentially tragic political ramifications to thinking "with the blood." But intellectually, too, Hughes was driven by "an awareness . . . [that] the subjective character of social thought" could easily slide into a denial of "the validity of all such thought." His discussion of "the problem of consciousness" anticipated some of the criticisms currently leveled against postmodernism, and he characterized his own intellectual position as "quite consciously 'eighteenth century.' I believe that we are all to a greater or lesser extent children of the Enlightenment." While disassociating himself from "the cult of positivism," Hughes nonetheless implicitly accepted the tenets of twentieth-century logical positivism in its more diffuse midcentury form. When he argued that the innovators of the 1890s had shifted the focus of inquiry from "the apparent and objectively verifiable to the only partially conscious area of unexplained motivation"; when he suggested that "psychological process had replaced external reality as the most pressing topic for investigation"; and when he stated that it "was no longer what actually existed that seemed most important: it was what men thought existed," Hughes was himself acknowledging the existence of an objectively verifiable "external reality." Furthermore, he implicitly accepted that rational inquiry—even into the uncharted waters of unconscious motivation—must be guided by the precepts of objectivity. And for him objectivity is only possible if there is some independent, nonsubjective guarantor of meaning.²⁶

Thus, for Hughes, the greatest thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were those who "while fighting every step of the way to salvage as much as possible of the rationalist heritage decisively shifted the axis of that tradition to make room for the new definition of man as something more (or less) than a logically calculating animal." The rationalist heritage involves keeping a firm grip on subjective interpretation or what might now be called self-reflexive analysis. Taken to extremes, as Hughes argued in the case of Georges Sorel, a preeminent subjectivity could indeed slide into "a kind of sociological mysticism." The danger for Hughes as well as for Émile Durkheim, then, was that the "self-consciousness" of the new social theory, particularly among those who "welcomed the advent of the irrational," could presage an assault on the dominion of rational objectivity and the emergence of a "renascent mysticism." This is why it was so important for Hughes to insist that among the "greatest" social thinkers a fascination with the irrational was not synonymous with becoming an "irrationalist." And it explains his harsh treatment of Carl Jung—startlingly dismissed as a

minor figure, and characterized as a betrayer of all that was most rational and radical in Freud's thought. Jung, who argued for an inward-looking spirituality as intrinsic to "self-realisation," was dismissed as "a frank intuitionist and irrationalist." More, he was vituperatively written off as "a mystagogue."²⁷

Conversely, and revealingly, Hughes did not object to Bergson's "philosophy of intuition," and sought to rescue Bergson from the ranks of the irrationalists to which (within the context of his own study) he believed only Péguy and Jung rightfully belonged. But why, when it was Bergson and not Jung who explicitly argued in the nonrational tradition for intuition as the key to the apprehension of reality, did Hughes seek to demote Jung? Why is it Jung (who, as Hughes acknowledges, thought of Bergson as "‘having broken a lance in defence of the irrational’") whom Hughes characterized as the "intuitionist and irrationalist"?²⁸ And why, when Hughes tells us that "the Bergsonian metaphysics was unique in having frankly mystical aspects," was Jung the "mystagogue"?²⁹ The answer lies in Jung's "mystical" proclivities. Bergson, while favoring "the intuitive approach" that came close to an occult argument for the complementarity of intuition and reason, did not embrace occultism. Jung, on the other hand, like Freud, was fascinated by the occult, but unlike Freud did not fear its influence. Hughes's condemnation of Jung—for that is what it is—turns upon Jung's application of occult insights to the study of the human psyche. Jung argued for the relevance of Eastern, mystical, and occult teachings for understanding the full dimensions of a deeply spiritualized concept of the self. In fact, as we know, he drew for his interpretation of the human psyche and particular idea of self-realization on elements of the occult tradition that were central to fin-de-siècle "mysticism."

Hughes, however, thought that Jung's "dabblings in the history of alchemy, his experiments with symbolic artifacts and the drawing of dreams, betray a restless imagination in search of new stimulation." According to Hughes, Jung "added virtually nothing to what the mystics have always known—and which . . . is not really *communicable*."³⁰ But an interest in alchemy, symbolic systems, and states other than that of waking consciousness were far less divorced from an engagement with "the problem of consciousness" than Hughes might have supposed. They were intimately bound up with a particular occult exploration and understanding of the self and self-consciousness at the turn of the century, and were part of a communicated occult tradition dedicated to imparting the "secrets" of the old wisdom. Hughes's "dabblings" of a "restless imagination" reflects neither Jung's interpretation of hermetic symbolism and its relevance for human conscious-

ness nor the disciplined study and focused imaginative practice of the dedicated occultist. Nevertheless, Jung's investment in occultism was sufficient to mark him out for Hughes as a "mystagogue . . . in the incongruous guise of a man of science." It was the "mysticism" that Hughes could not stomach: Jung the "irrationalist."³¹

Charges of irrationalism inevitably rely upon a historically specific understanding of what constitutes "the rational." Rationality, after all, is itself a convention. In a post-Enlightenment modern age, irrationalism has been clearly understood to refer to ways of seeing and experiencing the world that do not accord with empiricist precepts and rationalist paradigms of explanation. In particular, at least when used to characterize the ideas of otherwise sane and thoughtful individuals, irrationalism has often had spiritual or "mystical" connotations. This, however, defines the limits of consensus. For while both Holbrook Jackson and H. Stuart Hughes dichotomized "rational" and "mystical," they did so to different ends and with different effects. For Jackson, the "revolt against rationalism and the beginning of the revival of mysticism" had to do with a fin-de-siècle despair over the obvious follies and failures of conventional morality and the rule of reason. A "decadent" "soul-sickness," heir to Romantic aestheticism, was epitomized by that earlier movement's "revolt of the spirit against formal subservience to mere reason."³² The antidote, as Jackson saw it, was mysticism. In Jackson's analysis, spiritual desire was closely linked to the turn inwards and to the development of the self-consciousness that marked a fin-de-siècle conclusion to neo-Romanticism. "Mysticism" is here aestheticized and given a positive reading.

For Hughes, it was a related but different issue. In discussing "the problem of consciousness," he examined an innovative intellectual trend towards the recognition of the subjectivity of cognition and perception which, when held within the bounds of reason (or a Weberian "intellectualist rationalization"), could be liberating. Hughes was at pains to point out that a "critique of the Enlightenment was one of the central tasks that the major social thinkers of the early twentieth century set themselves," but he equally argued that "the new self-consciousness" had the potential to undermine what he considered best in the Enlightenment project. The valorization of subjectivity suggested precisely that Romantic blurring of the distinction between object and subject that put the lie to claims for the possibility of rational objectivity. The result of such blurring, Hughes suggested, was "sociological mysticism" and ultimately, in the case of Bergson and Sorel, "a kind of social mysticism."

Hughes concluded that the "question of rationality is the crucial one."

The work that had stood the test of time is that which managed to take what was best from the eighteenth-century intellectual tradition while avoiding the subjective slide into the “future errors of unreason.” This, he argued, was what the best of the intellectual innovators at the height of their powers had managed to achieve. They had kept to “the narrow path of faith in reason despite and even because of the drastic limitations with which psychological and historical discovery had hedged it.” For them, as for Hughes, “reason alone remained the final control and arbiter.”³³

Here, then, the irrational—or, more accurately, irrationalism—is equated with a departure from “the narrow path of faith in reason,” which in turn is read as a transgression that leads directly to the “future errors of unreason.” And this points to a further underlying concern and dimension to Hughes’s argument. For Hughes, there were two categories of criticism of the Enlightenment. First, as exemplified by “loyal” critics like Freud and Weber, there was a probing of the problem of human motivation and the structure of society, which reworked the Enlightenment tradition “in terms that would carry conviction to a skeptical generation.” Second, there was a “disloyal” class of criticism, which constituted a conscious attack on “the humane values of the West.” Hughes placed himself in the intellectual trajectory of the “loyal” critics. As a self-proclaimed child of the Enlightenment, he saw himself as heir “to a humane tradition more than two centuries old.” And he judged this “humane tradition” as the “standpoint” from which “civilized members of Western society . . . almost necessarily judge the political and social movements of their own time.” Thus, for Hughes, writing with a knowledge of twentieth-century world events that Holbrook Jackson did not have in 1913, there was a particular urgency to disassociating his “greatest” social theorists from charges of “romanticism,” “mysticism,” and irrationalism—from thinking “with the blood.” He stood by the Enlightenment tradition as ultimately “humane” even as he acknowledged an antithetical “disloyal” resistance to it that counteracts the “civilizing” mission of the past two hundred years. Hughes came close to recognizing that dialectic of Enlightenment for which Horkheimer and Adorno had argued only a decade earlier, but in the end stood by a dichotomized rendition of reason and “unreason” with the latter representing all that is uncivilized and barbaric.³⁴

And here is the rub. For while “mysticism” proposed just that reconciliation of objective and subjective reason proposed by Horkheimer as a solution to the problematic heritage of the Enlightenment—offering an all-embracing worldview and associated principles of moral value and spiritual purpose—it also relied on a philosophy of consciousness for which there is no apparent nonsubjective guarantor of meaning, and which can all too easily trans-

late into a romanticization of the shadowlands of subjectivity. The self-consciousness that marked the extreme modernity of occultism opened up the possibility of a mutually reinforcing valorization of the “errors of unreason.” If occult truths had reference only to the sovereignty of the initiated self, these truths, by definition, were a movable feast. The “egoistical” assertion “I am” and the terrible cry “I am I” of Aleister Crowley’s nemesis, Choronzon, are too closely related for comfort. There was ultimately nothing in the self-reflexivity of occultism to secure the meaning, for example, of “regeneration,” just as there was nothing to guarantee the kind of political mobilization that might occur in the name of W. B. Yeats’s “great memory” or Jung’s collective unconscious.

Indeed, the idea of a common racial memory, a phylogenetic unconscious, becomes problematic when it is linked to notions of racial superiority—as Jung’s detractors claim to have occurred in his case. When Ernst Bloch denounced Jung as “the psychoanalytic fascist,” he was referring to just that evocation of “the magical collective layers of the race” that H. Stuart Hughes called “thinking with the blood.”³⁵ Furthermore, this type of race-thinking was not specific to occult elaborations of the unconscious. It was equally evident in the twentieth-century development of Theosophy’s specification of hierarchical “races,” and the potent mix of *völkisch* elements and Aryan mysticism that featured in the Nazi account of German origins and national destiny. If this is the irrationalism to which mysticism can fall prey, then the fruits of a subjectivized “unreason” require the same careful patrolling as their Enlightenment counterparts. It is not so difficult to see the kind of distortions that Bergsonian vitalism underwent during the interwar years, or the ends to which a Romantic valorization of intuition and fantasy can be directed. Thinking this through in the context of current debates, we might say: if “unreason” is the postmodern sublime, then let the dark side of that exalted state be figured into the equation.

In *Consciousness and Society*, H. Stuart Hughes makes an admiring argument for Max Weber’s work. Weber, he suggests, recognized the power of the irrational in human affairs but, like Freud, sought to curb the romanticism he discovered within himself. What Weber crucially understood, of course, is that the desire and search for meaning is central to human experience. His social theories suggest that for cultures where traditional religious or metaphysical belief systems have been eroded, as in the modern “disenchanted” West, the major challenge is to generate a new coherent worldview and concomitant sense of ethical place and purpose. Indeed, as current commentators note, the creation of new meanings “out of the resources of the self” has become one of the strategies for “dealing with the modern hu-

man condition.”³⁶ It was in part this idea of the self as ultimate creator and arbiter of meaning that Holbrook Jackson recognized as characteristic of the 1890s. What is significant about Jackson’s analysis is that he associated the “idea of self-realisation” that lay “at the root of the modern attitude” with a morally and spiritually progressive “revolt against rationalism.” And, indeed, for many of those closely involved with it, the engagement with “mysticism” was synonymous with a commitment to social justice. Furthermore, all occultists believed that an attack on positivism and opposition to the dichotomization of reason and “unreason” could only contribute to the sum of human fulfillment. The new “mysticism” at the turn of the century was dedicated to a reworking of the idea of reason through a radical engagement with self-consciousness as the necessary route to an interiorized encounter with the divine. Holbrook Jackson’s “mysticism” predated the world events that might call into question its moral compass.

This, then, marks its historicity. If the fin-de-siècle occult anticipated aspects of the twentieth-century critique of the Enlightenment project, it also had its flowering before the tragic events that largely gave rise to such concerns. The Great War had not yet happened. Although some occultists subsequently viewed the events of 1914–18 through the lens of a mysticism dedicated to cyclical renewal and regeneration, it was impossible to ignore the terrible human cost of war waged on such a scale or the message it seemed to convey. After all, Horkheimer’s proposed reconciliation of subjective and objective reason represents a response to the problem of disenchantment as elaborated by Weber under tellingly similar historical circumstances. Both men were articulating the “program of the Enlightenment” as “the disenchantment of the world,” and both were speaking towards the end of catastrophic wars in which Germany played a leading role; moreover, each man was immersed in a “German” intellectual tradition grounded in Kant and Hegel. The self-destructiveness of the Enlightenment, the release of differently configured demonic powers that it implied, and the new kind of barbarism it heralded seemed clear. But for occultists at the turn of the century, these events, although foreshadowed by apocalyptic signs and portents, lay in the future. For them, “mysticism” signified precisely that occult goal of “seeking the light” that underwrote the Rosicrucian promise of a new spiritually enlightened age. It was the light, not the dark, to which the great majority of occultists aspired.

I have argued throughout *The Place of Enchantment* that fin-de-siècle “mysticism” was a thoroughly modern project—albeit one that sought to confound the modern distinction between reason and the irrational. Occultism constituted an attempt to rehabilitate the irrational via a reworking of the

idea of reason in the “mystical” domain, but this was a rationalizing endeavor dedicated to piercing the veil of the unknown rather than a spiritualized celebration of a terrifying “unreason.” In other words, this was not the recuperation of “unreason” in Hughes’s sense, but a project that sought to access and understand the great secrets of the universe through an “intellectualist rationalization” and all-encompassing knowledge of the occluded real. In fact, those involved with “mysticism” held as fast to the ethic of an objective (although different) reality as Hughes’s “greatest” thinkers. They adhered to a belief in a hidden and transcendental real, sought it in a variety of occult practices, and refused all suggestion that this real might be reducible to the merely subjectivized realm of personal interiority. Conversely, “mysticism” taught that interiority is the gateway to the real. This was a sensibility that was intrinsically bound up with the reconciliation of the rational and irrational, but one which recognized that reconciliation in a fully elaborated “self-realisation.” In the name of spiritual enlightenment, the new “mysticism” taught its adherents a rationalizing metaphysics that promised knowledge of and control over Weber’s archaic “mysterious incalculable forces.” In so doing, it called on a premodern magical tradition and assumed those eternal truths and values that Weber argued had been diminished in the modern age. But the magic of the “mystical” revival was equally the magic of high modernity. It both presented a grand narrative of the universal order and sought the answers to the age-old questions about truth, meaning, and human destiny in the far reaches of human consciousness and a newly psychologized self.

At many levels, “mysticism” was representative of a crisis of the disenchanted Weberian subject. The new “spiritual movement of the age” confirmed the authority of rational self-authenticating subjectivity and at the same time spoke to the inadequacies of a worldview that did not include the possibility of living with God. Born of the desire for answers, meaning, and purpose in an increasingly disenchanted world, fin-de-siècle occultists drew on Enlightenment precepts and an apparently inimical wisdom tradition while shifting the focus and play of both. Integral to this shift was a differently conceived relationship between the imagination and reason. Advanced occultists remained deeply enamored of what they believed to be the ultimate morality of a properly developed and understood reason, and assumed that this reason exercised in the service of the imagination constitutes the key to a supreme self-realization. At the heart of the project lay a newly imagined self—an occult subjectivity formulated within the context of secularized modes of inquiry but dedicated to a spiritualized understanding of the “I.” These occultists, heirs to Enlightenment certainties, sought the infi-

nite in a newly psychologized but potentially divine self. Enchantment was synonymous with the journey into self-realization, and it was this fully realized and sublime self that constituted the ends of modern occultism. Modern magicians created and inhabited an enchanted landscape in which the exulting personal self and impersonal grand design were conjoined in a modern narrative of (and for) life. In so doing, they envisioned a subjectivity capable of reconciling some of the very contradictions that constituted this moment of high modernity.

Perhaps, after all, what is so recognizably familiar about the *fin de siècle* is not so much its disenchantment as the evident unresolved tension between the spiritual and secular that surely marks the modern period. I have pursued this theme in *The Place of Enchantment* by exploring the ways in which occultism at the turn of the century was deeply engaged in the reconciliation of secular imperatives and spiritual desire through a renegotiation of the idea of self. Advanced occult theory and magical practice represented a reworking of the concept and experience of self that underscored the self's contingency while anchoring it in the coherent and spiritualized realm of human consciousness. At the same time, however, in elucidating occultism's simultaneous resistance to a secularized formulation of human consciousness and commitment to a rationalized experience of the spiritual, I am also proposing that the occult constituted a crucial enactment of the ambiguities of the modern. Committed to a rationalized understanding of the irrational, involved with the elaboration of a worldview that claimed allegiance to much older religious and magical traditions, and caught up in some of the most avant-garde preoccupations of the day, *fin-de-siècle* occultism exemplified the spiritualized investments of modern disenchanted subjectivity. In terms of an ultimate politics of location, then, it might be said that the place of enchantment was the enlightened self.

NOTES

Introduction

1. This incident is recorded by Freud's follower and biographer, Ernest Jones, who devoted a section of *The Life and Work* to occultism. See Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1957), 3:391–92.

2. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890–1930* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), 34.

3. Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 239.

4. José Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain 1870–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 173.

5. Edwin Muir (under the pseudonym of Edward Moore) wrote a regular column for the Edwardian journal *New Age* entitled “We Moderns.” The pieces were later collected and published as a book: Edward Moore, *We Moderns: Enigmas and Guesses* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1918).

6. See Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 15.

7. The ongoing debate concerning the definition, meaning, and social viability of magic is of nineteenth-century origin. Among the many formative names associated with this debate, James George Frazer, Marcel Mauss, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard spring to mind. For a relatively recent analysis of the literature and attempt at a general theory of magic, see Daniel Lawrence O’Keefe, *Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982).

8. I am thinking here particularly of Georg Simmel (1858–1918) and Walter Benjamin (1892–1940). For a consideration of their analyses of modernity “provisionally understood as the modes of experiencing that which is ‘new’ in ‘modern’ society,” together with that of Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966), see David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986).

9. This is what Marshall Berman called the classic second phase of modernity. See Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1988), 17.

10. I borrow the phrase “the project of Enlightenment” from Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity: An Unfinished Project,” in Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib, eds.,

Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997). “Modernity” is the text of a speech delivered by Habermas in 1980 when he was awarded the Adorno Prize.

11. For a recent example of this discussion, see Robert J. Antonio and Ronald M. Glassman, eds., *A Marx-Weber Dialogue* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1985).

12. The secularization literature is vast, but any study involving Victorian religion should begin with Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols. (London: A. & C. Black, 1966–70). Two classic and contemporaneous statements in the secularization debate are Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966) and David Martin, *A Sociology of English Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1967). For a concise and insightful analysis of the issues in the British context, see Alan D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A History of the Secularization of Modern Society* (London: Longman, 1980). For a recent helpful assessment of the contribution of British sociologists of religion, see Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, “Religion: The British Contribution,” *British Journal of Sociology* 40, no. 3 (1989): 493–520. Steve Bruce, ed., *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), provides a pertinent introduction to the issue of secularization and features contributions from leading protagonists in the field.

13. Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 155, 138–39, 142. “Science as a Vocation” was delivered as a speech at Munich University in 1917. For a discussion of the date of Weber’s lecture, traditionally thought to have been given in 1918, see Wolfgang Schluchter, “The Question of the Dating of ‘Science as a Vocation’ and ‘Politics as a Vocation,’” in *Max Weber’s Vision of History: Ethics and Methods*, ed. Guenther Roth and Wolfgang Schluchter (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 113–16.

14. O. Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, 258.

15. For an early collective statement of the Victorian “crisis,” see Anthony Symondson, ed., *The Victorian Crisis of Faith* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1970); and for a more recent reassessment, Richard J. Helmstadter and Bernard Lightman, eds., *Victorian Faith in Crisis: Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Religious Belief* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990).

Chapter One

1. Holbrook Jackson briefly coedited with A. R. Orage the prescient periodical *New Age*, which was revived in 1907. For the cultural significance of Orage’s *New Age*, see Paul Selver, *Orage and the New Age Circle: Reminiscences and Reflections* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1959); and the more comprehensive Wallace Martin, *The New Age under Orage: Chapters in English Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967). Orage was a socialist and Theosophist.

2. Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (1913; reprint, New York: Capricorn Books, 1966), 31, 27, 132. The other two defining characteristics were “the so-called Decadence” and “the introduction of a Sense of Fact into literature and art.” My reliance on Jackson’s analysis is not idiosyncratic. *The Eighteen Nineties* is a superb (and in some respects unsurpassed) piece of literary and cultural criticism. As John Stokes, *In the Nineties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 167, notes: “It remains unchallenged in its scope.”

3. José Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain 1870–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 174, comments that on the eve of the First World War *The Times* reli-

gious correspondent was using the terms “spiritual renaissance” and “mystical revival” to define the explosion of interest he saw around him.

4. Isabelle de Steiger, *Memorabilia: Reminiscences of a Woman Artist and Scholar* (London: Rider & Co., 1927), 154. De Steiger was heavily involved with the occult during the period under consideration.

5. J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780–1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), explores a rich earlier tradition of popular religious heterodoxy. The theme is sustained in its gendered dimensions by Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago Press, 1983).

6. George Bernard Shaw, preface to “Heartbreak House” (1917), in *Four Plays by Bernard Shaw* (New York: The Modern Library, 1953), 330.

7. An interest in mesmerism and phrenology tended to go hand in hand, and both represent particular attempts to understand the nature of the mind. For excellent and wide-ranging studies of British phrenology and mesmerism, see Roger Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organisation of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Winter (chap. 10) notes that the spiritual claims for mesmerism were being advanced from the 1830s and became hotly debated during the 1840s and early 1850s.

8. For the more recent literature on nineteenth-century British spiritualism, see Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968); Geoffrey K. Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850–1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); and Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Spiritualist numbers are difficult to gauge because formal membership of spiritualist organizations represented only a small percentage of those who regularly participated in some form of spiritualist activity. Numbers have been put at anywhere between 10,000 and 100,000. See Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, 77; Barrow, *Independent Spirits*, 97; and Oppenheim, *The Other World*, 49–50.

9. Owen, *The Darkened Room*, explores the familial and gendered aspects of Victorian spiritualism.

10. Home was born in Scotland in 1833 and later emigrated to America with his family before returning as an established medium in the mid-1850s. He is the subject of Robert Browning’s scathing poem, “Mr Sludge, ‘The Medium.’” For a partial account of Home’s mediumship, see Elizabeth Jenkins, *The Shadow and the Light: A Defence of Daniel Dunglas Home, the Medium* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1982).

11. Spiritualism flourished in Russia and throughout western Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century, while spiritualist believers in America during the height of the craze in the 1850s could possibly have numbered between 1 million and 2 million. For her observations about Russian spiritualism, see Maria Carlson, “Fashionable Occultism: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry and Hermeticism in Fin-de-Siècle Russia,” in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 135–52. For the number of American spiritualists, see Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850*

(Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1950), 347; and R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 14.

12. Annie Besant, *Esoteric Christianity: or, The Lesser Mysteries* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1901; New York: John Lane, 1902), 127.

13. A. P. Sinnett, *The Occult World* (London: Trübner & Co., 1881), 6.

14. See Edward Maitland, *Anna Kingsford. Her Life, Letters, Diary and Work* (London: George Redway, 1896), 2:379, for a discussion of the new spirituality as a phenomenon of the 1890s. All references to this work are from this edition unless otherwise stated.

15. Madame de Steiger (for example, *Memorabilia*, 154) was typical in insisting that “Occultism and Mysticism are synonymous.”

16. *Ibid.*, 155.

17. Winston Spencer Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 1:268–69, cited in Helen Merrell Lynd, *England in the Eighteen-Eighties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 3. Lynd’s book remains a useful, careful, and evocative exploration of this important decade.

18. Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916), 240, 245. Carpenter was closely associated with socialist and “transcendental” movements while maintaining his own distinctive stance and voice. See Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter, 1844–1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

19. Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 246. Carpenter is using *millennium* in its theological sense, to indicate the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. See Mark Bevir, “The Labour Church Movement, 1891–1902,” *Journal of British Studies* 38, no. 2 (April 1999): 217–45, for a recent revisionist discussion of the relationship between an immanentist faith in God and ethical socialism.

20. For an account of Annie Besant’s remarkable life, see Arthur H. Nethercot, *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant* (London: Hart-Davis, 1961) and *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant* (London: Hart-Davis, 1963); Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

21. See Annie Besant, *Why I Became a Theosophist* (New York: “The Path” Office, 1891), 32. The pamphlet was written by Besant in July 1889. Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2001), offers an excellent and detailed consideration of the relationship between Theosophy and feminism during the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries.

22. Letter to Archibald Henderson, 3 January 1905, in Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters, 1898–1910*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1972), 497. The investigation of Madame Blavatsky by the Society for Psychical Research during the mid-1880s is considered briefly hereafter. For Shaw’s claim that it was he who gave a review copy of *The Secret Doctrine* to Besant, see A. Taylor, *Annie Besant*, 243; and Marion Meade, *Madame Blavatsky: The Woman behind the Myth* (New York: Putnam, 1980), 425.

23. Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, 24. Jackson cites as evidence of the eclectic mix of “social” and “transcendental” the kinds of coverage that appeared in the pages of A. E. Fletcher’s *Daily Chronicle*, T. P. O’Connor’s *Star*, Orage’s *New Age*, Robert Blatchford’s *Clarion*, and W. T. Stead’s *Review of Reviews*.

24. For a relevant discussion of Orage’s views, see David S. Thatcher, *Nietzsche in England, 1890–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970). For the cultural significance of Orage’s *New Age*, see Selver, *Orage and the New Age Circle*; and the more comprehensive W. Martin, *The New Age Under Orage*.

25. For a formative discussion of the ethical socialism of the Fellowship of the New Life in relation to Edward Carpenter and the sexual theorist Havelock Ellis, see Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London: Pluto Press, 1977). I am not suggesting that all occultists were socialists, although some undoubtedly were.

26. De Steiger, *Memorabilia*, 257.

27. Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, 29.

28. Jackson was elected honorary secretary of the 1907 breakaway Fabian Arts Group, formed to reinstate the importance of art and philosophy to the socialist vision. The group included A. R. Orage, G. B. Shaw, H. G. Wells, and Lowes Dickinson, and *New Age* was purchased in part to provide a platform for their ideas.

29. James Webb's study, *The Occult Underground* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Company, 1974), first published as *The Flight from Reason* (London: Macdonald and Co., 1971), is an important work that situates a wealth of invaluable material on nineteenth-century occultism within this explanatory paradigm. Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (London: Rider and Company, 1972), 12–13, places similar emphasis on occultism as a response to social and political crisis. More recently, R. F. Foster, "Protestant Magic: W. B. Yeats and the Spell of Irish History," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 75 (London, 1989), 243–66, has argued that an interest in the occult among the Irish Protestant Ascendancy during this period was motivated by escapism in the face of decline, a suggestion reiterated in his impressive study of W. B. Yeats. See, for example, R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 50.

30. Terry Eagleton, "The Flight to the Real," in *Cultural Politics at the Fin De Siècle*, edited by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 11–21, is suggestive of precisely this point.

31. For a discussion of scientific naturalism, see Frank Miller Turner, *Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), 8–37.

32. Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, chap. 2, p. 65; Turner, *Between Science and Religion*, ix; and Oppenheim, *The Other World*, introduction and passim.

33. Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 143.

34. Ralph Shirley (1865–1946) was a younger brother of the Eleventh Earl Ferrers. Shirley was extremely interested in the occult and, as the owner of the publishing firm Rider & Co., was responsible for a steady stream of related publications. Bradford J. M. Verter, "Dark Star Rising: The Emergence of Modern Occultism, 1800–1950," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1997, chap. 2 and passim, pays close attention to the issue of occultism as "a literary culture" (96).

35. Stead literally discussed the purposes of his journal with reference to "this age" when we are "democratising everything," and clearly had in mind a timely complement to the work of the elite Society for Psychical Research. See *Borderland* 1, no. 1 (July 1893).

36. Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The History of the Theosophical Society* (6 vols., 1895–1935; reprinted as *Inside the Occult: The True Story of Madame H. P. Blavatsky* [Philadelphia: Running Press, 1975]), 294 (page reference is to the reprint edition), makes the claim for the sales of the first edition, and cites as his source the *American Bookseller* (October 1877). See also Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 58. Prothero provides a valuable account of Olcott's role in the Theosophical Society and his engagement with Buddhism.

37. For recent accounts of Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society, see Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980); Meade, *Madame Blavatsky*; and S. L. Cranston, *HPB: The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement* (New York: Putnam, 1993).

38. For the European rise of “orientalism,” see Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe’s Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); originally published as *La Renaissance Orientale* (Paris: Payot, 1950).

39. See, for example, Eugène Burnouf, *L’introduction à l’histoire du bouddhisme indien* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1844); R[obert] Spence Hardy, *A Manual of Buddhism in Its Modern Development* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1853); and Max Müller, “Buddhist Pilgrims” (1857), “The Meaning of Nirvana” (1857), and “Buddhism” (1862), in his *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. 1 (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1876). For helpful discussions of the reception of Buddhism, see, Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844–1912* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

40. See George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), for a consideration of these issues within the broad context of the development of Victorian anthropology.

41. The Indian (or Hindu) Renaissance was a movement of English-speaking intellectuals in nineteenth-century British India who sought to revitalize an ancient culture while encouraging modernization and reform. See David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969) and *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979). For Olcott’s involvement, see Prothero, *The White Buddhist*, chap. 6.

42. I use the term *Anglo-Indian* in its nineteenth-century sense to denote the British in India.

43. For *The Occult World*, see note 13 of the present chapter; and A. P. Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism* (London: Trübner & Co., 1883). *Esoteric Buddhism* had gone into its sixth edition by 1888 and its eighth by 1903.

44. H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy being a clear exposition, in the form of question and answer of the Ethics, Science and Philosophy for the Study of which the Theosophical Society has been Founded* (1889; reprint, Los Angeles: The United Lodge of Theosophists, 1920), 10 (original italics).

45. *Ibid.*, 11.

46. F. Max Müller, “Esoteric Buddhism,” *The Nineteenth Century* 33 (May 1893): 775, 784.

47. See A. P. Sinnett, “Esoteric Buddhism (A Reply to Professor Max Müller),” *The Nineteenth Century* 33 (June 1893): 1015–27; and F. Max Müller, “Esoteric Buddhism: A Rejoinder,” *The Nineteenth Century* 34 (August 1893): 296–303.

48. Allan Bennett was a member of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society and, similarly, the inner sanctum or Second Order of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. A talented magician, Bennett left England for Ceylon about the turn of the century and became a Buddhist monk in Burma. It was as Bikkhu Ananda Metleya that Bennett subsequently established a Buddhist Lodge in England that later developed into the Buddhist Society. See also chapter 2, note 80, and chapter 6, note 12.

49. Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 2:140–41.

50. For a discussion of the cultural significance of secret societies in this period, see Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton

University Press, 1989); and Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989). For an account of English Freemasonry (written by a Mason), see John Hamill, *The Craft: A History of English Freemasonry* (London: Crucible, 1986). The relationship between Freemasonry and occultism is considered in greater detail in chapter 2 of the present text.

51. See Olcott, *Inside the Occult*, 202–19, for his account of how *Isis Unveiled* was written.

52. For a discussion of Blavatsky's detractors and plagiarism, see Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 32–34.

53. The “three objects” of the Theosophical Society were formulated in the early 1880s and enshrined in its constitution. Madame Blavatsky offered a slightly different formulation of the “objects” in her discussion of them in *The Key to Theosophy*, 30–39.

54. See the privately circulated document from the Society for Psychical Research Committee, “First report of the Committee of the Society for Psychical Research, Appointed to Investigate the Evidence for Marvelous Phenomena Offered by Certain Members of the Theosophical Society” (London: n.p., 1885); and “Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate Phenomena Connected with the Theosophical Society,” *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 3 (December 1885), 201–400.

55. Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, is devoted to the elaboration of these ideas. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 61–74, provides an accessible summary of the complex (sometimes contradictory) corpus of Theosophical teachings.

56. Lord Rayleigh was Cavendish Professor of Experimental Physics at Cambridge and famous for his work on electrical measurement and the co-discovery of the gas argon. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for physics in 1904. J. J. Thomson succeeded Rayleigh as the Cavendish Professor in 1884 and conducted experiments that revealed the existence of the electron. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for physics in 1906. Both men were members of the SPR council during the 1880s and 1890s, and Rayleigh served as a vice-president of the society. Oppenheim, *The Other World*, chap. 8, considers at length the different appeal of psychic phenomena for physicists during this period.

57. H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (1877; reprint, Pasadena, Calif.: Theosophical University Press, 1988), i:ix, vii. Blavatsky's citation reads simply “*Fragments of Science*.” See John Tyndall, “The Belfast Address,” in *Fragments of Science. A Series of Detached Essays, Addresses, and Reviews*, 8th ed., 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892), 2:197. Tyndall was superintendent of the Royal Institution.

58. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 87, names Wallace as a member of the Theosophical Society.

59. See George John Romanes, “The Fallacy of Materialism. 1. Mind and Body,” *Nineteenth Century* 12 (December 1882): 871–88. For Romanes's meeting with Blavatsky, see Countess Constance Wachtmeister et al., *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky and the Secret Doctrine* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1893; reprint, Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1976), 71 (page reference is to the reprint edition). Wachtmeister was Blavatsky's close companion during her years in London, 1887–91. For a related discussion of Wallace and Romanes, see Turner, *Between Science and Religion*, chaps. 4 and 6 respectively.

60. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, i:vii.

61. Sinnett, *The Occult World*, 4–5.

62. Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, xv.

63. “Notes of the Month,” *The Occult Review* 6, no. 5 (November 1907): 593–94.

64. T. H. Huxley, *Collected Essays* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1894), 1:51; cited in Turner, *Between Science and Religion*, 8.

65. See Leonard Huxley, *Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1916), 1:451–56; and Oppenheim, *The Other World*, 290–92. William Crookes discovered the element thallium in 1861 and was elected to the Royal Society two years later. His gifts as both a chemist and physicist won the admiration of scientists like Rayleigh and Thomson. Crookes was heavily involved in psychical research during the 1870s, and his reputation (both moral and scientific) was endangered by his espousal of the mediumship of the young Florence Cook. He later announced his disillusionment with spiritualism. Crookes was knighted in 1897 and awarded the Order of Merit in 1910. Francis Galton, often referred to as the father of eugenics, was interested in the relationship between heredity and personality. Although he was never a formal member of the Society for Psychical Research, Galton was involved with psychical research during the 1870s and early 1880s. He was knighted in 1909.

66. See P. M. Harman, *Energy, Force, and Matter: The Conceptual Development of Nineteenth-Century Physics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), for an accessible account of the development of Victorian physics.

67. Besant, *Why I Became a Theosophist*, 32.

68. See Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, 21–25.

69. Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, chap. 2, equates the early Theosophical Society with a masculine “clubland.” Hamill, *The Craft*, 22–24, is quick to discount a direct connection between occultism and Freemasonry. While this might strictly be the case, he makes no mention of the fact that Victorian Freemasons were heavily involved with occultism.

70. Henry Salt is a fascinating figure in his own right. He was an early member of Hyndman’s Social Democratic Federation, a great admirer of Edward Carpenter, and friend of George Bernard Shaw. Carpenter and Shaw both supported the Humanitarian League and were similarly devoted vegetarians.

71. A wealthy woman in her own right, Marie had first married the Condé de Medina Pomar and then the fourteenth Earl of Caithness. She lived in grand style in Paris following the earl’s death in 1881, and her home became the fashionable center of spiritualism and Theosophy.

72. Anna Kingsford to Lady Caithness, 8 June 1883, in Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 2:120. Although raised an Anglican and married to a clergyman, Algernon Godfrey Kingsford, Anna Kingsford found in Catholicism a spiritual richness that she found lacking in Protestantism.

73. See [Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland], “A Letter Addressed to the Fellows of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society, by The President and a Vice-President of the Lodge” (n.p.: privately printed, 1883); and Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 2:140–41.

74. For Maitland’s account of this episode, see Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 2:166–7. See also Meade, *Madame Blavatsky*, 292–93.

75. [Anna (Bonus) Kingsford and Edward Maitland], *The Perfect Way; or, The Finding of Christ* (London: Field & Tuer, 1882).

76. Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 2:168.

77. Letter from C. C. Massey to Edward Maitland, 16 July 1884. Cited in *ibid.*, 2:174.

78. See Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 240–45.

79. Maitland records the program in *Anna Kingsford*, 2:233–34.

80. See Anna Bonus Kingsford, *Dreams and Dream-Stories*, ed. Edward Maitland (London: George Redway, 1888); Edward Maitland, *Clothed with the Sun. Being the Book of the Illuminations of Anna (Bonus) Kingsford* (New York: John W. Lovell Company, 1889); and Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*.

81. See Édouard Schuré, *The Great Initiates: Sketch of the Secret History of Religions*, trans. Fred Rothwell (London: William Rider & Son, Ltd., 1912); originally published as *Les Grands Initiés, Esquisse de l'histoire secrète des religions* (Paris: Perrin, 1889). Like Blavatsky, Édouard Schuré promoted the concept of a unifying inner or esoteric teaching at the heart of the world's great religions.

82. This theme is explored in John Senior, *The Way Down and Out: The Occult in Symbolist Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1959).

83. Eliphas Lévi (1810–75) was born Alphonse-Louis Constant, also referred to as the Abbé Constant.

84. Edward Bulwer Lytton, *Zanoni* (Paris: A. and W. Galignani and Co., 1842; London: n.p., 1842). Lord Lytton (1802–73), who wrote *Zanoni* as Edward Bulwer, was involved with Rosicrucian Freemasonry and in 1871 became Grand Patron of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (see note 89 of the present chapter). Nineteenth-century occultists, including Madame Blavatsky, admired *Zanoni* and took it seriously as a contribution to occultism. In an interesting Theosophical twist, Lord Edward Lytton (Bulwer Lytton's son) protected the Theosophical Society in India in his capacity as viceroy, and Lord Lytton's daughter, Lady Emily Lutyens, became an ardent Theosophist in 1910. Lady Lutyens's husband, Edwin Lutyens, was appointed architect to imperial Delhi in 1912. See Meade, *Madame Blavatsky*, 208; and A. Taylor, *Annie Besant*, 293.

85. The Société Isis was the name of the relaunched French branch of the Theosophical Society. Martinism was a form of speculative Freemasonry that originated with the eighteenth-century teachings of Martinès de Pasqually and was developed by Louis Claude de Saint-Martin (1743–1803), a strict Catholic who wrote extensively on mysticism and occultism.

86. From an article published in *L'Initiation*, June 1890; cited in McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*, 171. McIntosh (171–76) provides an account of the late nineteenth-century Cabalistic wars in France. For a brief relevant account of French occultism during this period, see Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination, 1880–1900*, trans. Derek Colman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 97–118. See also Senior, *The Way Down and Out*, 117–44.

87. For a comprehensive account of Russian occultism that focuses on Theosophy, see Maria Carlson, “No Religion Higher Than Truth”: *A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993). She notes (20) that Papus established a Martinist Order at the court of Tsar Nicholas II, and that the Tsar was an initiate. See also Lauren G. Leighton, *The Esoteric Tradition in Russian Romantic Literature: Decembrism and Freemasonry* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); and Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), pt. 2.

88. For a detailed and comprehensive survey of European occultism, see Webb, *The Occult Underground*. For fin-de-siècle French magic/occultism, see McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*; and Robert Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France: Joséphin Péladan and the Salons de la Rose-Croix* (New York: Garland Pub., 1976).

89. See chapter 2, note 2 for a discussion of the Rosicrucian tradition. The chapter also refers to the secret Rosicrucian Masonic Order, the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, which was founded in England in 1865. Its membership was involved in the formation of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

90. H. P. Blavatsky, *Practical Occultism and Occultism versus The Occult Arts (Lucifer)* [April and May 1888]; reprint, London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1912), 6, 26 (original emphasis); page references are to the reprint edition.

91. See Annie Besant, *Occultism, Semi-Occultism and Pseudo-Occultism*, a lecture delivered to the Blavatsky Lodge, London, 30 June 1898 (2d ed., Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1920), 16 (original emphasis).

92. Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 2:177. Maitland records the teaching given to Kingsford on p. 215; Kingsford discusses her use of ritual magic in her diary, 17 November 1886, reproduced on pp. 270–73.

93. A letter from Madame Blavatsky to Anna Kingsford, 29 November 1886, voicing her opposition to the latter's use of ritual magic against vivisectionists, is reproduced in *ibid.*, 2:274.

94. Besant, *Occultism, Semi-Occultism and Pseudo-Occultism*, 6.

95. See Charles Gore, ed., *Lux Mundi. A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* (London: John Murray, 1889). *Lux Mundi* was in its tenth printing by August 1890. For the controversy surrounding the book, see Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, pt. 2, 1860–1901 (London: SCM Press, 1987), 101–8.

96. William Ralph Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (London: Methuen & Co., 1899); preface to the 7th ed. (1932), v.

97. Arthur Lillie, *Modern Mystics and Modern Magic* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1894), covers a broad terrain ranging from mystics like Swedenborg and Jacob Boehme to Madame Blavatsky and the subject of ghosts. Lillie was a member of Anna Kingsford's Hermetic Society. Prentice Mulford, *The Gift of the Spirit* (London: George Redway, 1898), comprises a series of vague spiritually oriented essays with titles like "The God in Yourself" and is written for a popular audience. Nonetheless, it is graced with an introduction by A. E. Waite, a writer on occult topics and member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

98. Besant, *Esoteric Christianity*. Besant had already published a series of lectures on this theme in 1898.

99. See "Modern Mystics Anna Bonus Kingsford and Edward Maitland," *The Occult Review* 6, no. 5 (November 1907): 601–13.

100. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism. A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1911; 12th ed., New York: E. P. Dutton & Company Inc., 1930), 72 (original emphasis).

101. This turned out to be a young Brahmin boy, Jiddu Krishnamurti, who was proclaimed the Lord Maitreya or vehicle of Christ. The Order of the Star in the East was established by Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater to sponsor and promote Krishnamurti, and many who joined it also became members of the Theosophical Society. Krishnamurti gave up his claim to being a World Teacher in 1929 but went on to a respected international career as a lecturer and author on metaphysical subjects.

102. George Robert Stow Mead (1863–1933) had earlier been joint secretary of the Esoteric section of the Theosophical Society with Annie Besant. He was a classicist and interpreter of Gnosticism. Leadbeater's involvement in a sexual scandal that divided the Theosophical Society is discussed briefly in chapter 3 of the present text. Besant's continued support for Leadbeater alienated many within the Theosophical Society.

103. *The Quest* 1 (April 1910): flyleaf.

104. The Quest Society grew gradually, obtained its own premises in 1919, and survived until 1930. It remained a scholarly and intellectual group dedicated to the discussion of "esoteric" topics. See R. A. Gilbert, *A. E. Waite: Magician of Many Parts* (Wellingborough: Crucible, 1987), 103–4.

105. For a recent thoroughgoing and provocative treatment of modern German occultism, see Corinna Treitel, "Avatars of the Soul: Cultures of Science, Medicine, and the Occult in

Modern Germany,” Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1999. Treitel’s work, pursued independently of my own and with a different sociocultural emphasis, similarly argues that the occultism of the 1880s to the 1930s must be viewed as integral to German modernization.

Chapter Two

1. Ritual magic is often referred to as ceremonial or operational magic, and at the turn of the century was synonymous with practical occultism.

2. The history of the Rosicrucian tradition is a vexed one, but we know that the term *Rosicrucian* derives from the name *Rosencreutz*, or “Rose Cross.” The mythical figure of “Christian Rosencreutz” first makes his appearance in the “Rosicrucian manifestos,” two short pamphlets that are usually abbreviated as the *Fama* and the *Confessio* and were published at Cassel in 1614 and 1615. The *Fama* recounts the tale of the son of a German nobleman, “C. R.,” who travels widely, becomes an occult Adept, and founds a secret magical order called the Fraternity of the Rosy Cross. A third pamphlet, translated from the German as *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz*, was published in 1616. Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), suggests that the seventeenth-century Rosicrucian movement was in part an allegory for a renewed “general reformation” based on a strengthened Protestant alliance with Frederick V, Elector Palatine of the Rhine, at its center. I am indebted to her account, and to her explication of the Renaissance Hermetic tradition in *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). For an account of Rosicrucianism written by a Hermetic scholar and member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, see Arthur Edward Waite, *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (London: W. Rider & Sons, 1924).

3. The vast body of “Hermetic” literature ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus, thought by the Renaissance magi to be an ancient Egyptian priest, was probably the work of various unknown Greek authors. Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614) revealed the Hermetic writings to be more modern in origin, and scholars currently assume dates ranging from AD 100 to 300. See Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 2–3; and Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 163.

4. Arthur Edward Waite, *The Occult Sciences: A Compendium of Transcendental Doctrine and Experiment* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Co., 1891), 1.

5. Frederick Hockley (1808–85) was one of the most esteemed occultists of the Victorian period, but he eschewed formal occult associations and little is known of his life. He considered himself a Rosicrucian, was adept in the art of crystal gazing, knew a great deal about magic, and possessed a legendary occult library. He was initiated into Freemasonry late in life, and was a member of (although not active in) the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia. See John Hamill, ed., *The Rosicrucian Seer: Magical Writings of Frederick Hockley* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1986). Kenneth Mackenzie (b. 1833) was a great admirer of Hockley, although for a while the two men were not on friendly terms. Mackenzie, too, was a Freemason and member of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia. He visited Eliphas Lévi in Paris in 1861 and was one of the first British occultists to become interested in the Tarot method of divination. He had a significant effect on the founding generation of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. See Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order, 1887–1923* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 27–33.

6. Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 23–25, reproduces “The Historic Lecture for Neophytes” and provides a clear and detailed analysis of what he calls the “suspect docu-

ments” of the Order. Howe was not an occultist, but he had access to the then-private collection of Golden Dawn papers held by Gerald Yorke, and was belatedly privy to a second private collection of Order documents. His is the most reliable account of the history of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and he concludes that the Order was founded on a fraud. Others, usually those more closely involved with occultism, disagree. Gerald Suster, “Suster’s Answer to Howe” in Israel Regardie, *What You Should Know about the Golden Dawn* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Falcon Press, 1985), 159–78, reviews the controversy and concludes that Howe’s claim is “not proven.”

7. William Wynn Westcott, “The Religion of Freemasonry,” *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 1 (1886–88): 55–8; reprinted in R. A. Gilbert, ed., *The Magical Mason: Forgotten Hermetic Writings of William Wynn Westcott, Physician and Magus* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983), 122.

8. William Wynn Westcott, “A Further Glance at the Kabalah,” *Lucifer* 12, nos. 68 and 69 (April and May 1893), 147–53; reprinted in R. A. Gilbert, ed., *The Magical Mason*, 109. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 218, concluded that the “European phenomenon of Freemasonry almost certainly was connected with the Rosicrucian movement,” but recognized that the two movements were not identical. Interestingly, while with some justice dismissing the “so-called ‘occultist’ writing” on the subject, Yates drew on Arthur Edward Waite’s work *The Real History of the Rosicrucians* (London: G. Redway, 1887) for her own study. She undoubtedly did not realize that Waite was himself an occultist, albeit of the scholarly variety.

9. See Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 8, 26–33.

10. Ellic Howe thought it highly unlikely that the Fräulein Sprengel/Soror S. D. A. correspondence was written by a native-speaking German. For his consideration of the founding documents, see *ibid.*, 1–25.

11. Although Howe, *ibid.*, 8, states that Westcott did not apply for membership in the Theosophical Society, the latter was a signatory of a letter complaining about some of the press coverage following Blavatsky’s death. This letter states that the signatories are “members of the Theosophical Society, who have known intimately the late H. P. Blavatsky.” See *Lucifer* 8 (March–August 1891): 319–20.

12. For Westcott’s articles on the Cabala published in *Lucifer*, see William Wynn Westcott, “The Ten Sephiroth,” *Lucifer* 8 (March–August 1891): 48–49; “The Kabalah,” *ibid.*, 465–69, continued in *ibid.* 9 (September 1891–February 1892): 27–32; and “The Kabalah,” *ibid.* 12 (March–August 1893): 147–53, 203–8. For Westcott’s occult publications, some of which were pamphlets rather than books, see *Rosicrucian Thoughts on the Ever-Burning Lamps of the Ancients*, reprinted from *The Freemason* (London: G. Kenning, 1885); *Tabula Bembina sive Mensa Isiaca: The Isiac Tablet of Cardinal Bembo* (Bath: R. H. Fryer, 1887); *Sepher Yetzirah, the Book of Formation*, trans. from the Hebrew (Bath: R. H. Fryer, 1887); *Numbers: Their Occult Power and Mystic Virtues* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1890); *The Magical Ritual of the Sanctum Regnum, interpreted by the Tarot Trumps*, trans. from the Mss. of Éliphas Lévi (London: George Redway, 1896); *History of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* (London: privately printed, 1900); and *An Introduction to the Study of the Kabalah* (London: John M. Watkins, 1910). R. A. Gilbert, ed., *The Magical Mason*, also provides a useful selection of Westcott’s writings.

13. Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, *Zohar. Kabbala Denudata: The Kabbalah Unveiled*, trans. from the Latin version of Knorr von Rosenroth (London: George Redway, 1887). For references to “a notable expert” in occultism who proposed to teach Anna Kingsford practical occultism, see Edward Maitland, *Anna Kingsford: Her Life, Letters, Diary and Work* (London: George Redway, 1896), 2:246–47. For references to the papers given to the Hermetic Society by Westcott and MacGregor Mathers, see Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 2:233–34.

14. Moina Mathers, preface to the fourth edition of S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *Kabbala De-*

nudata: The Kabbalah Unveiled (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1926), xii–xiii. Moina Mathers supplies a brief biography of her husband in her preface. Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 37–38, cites brief biographical details that he attributes to an unpublished memorandum written by William Wynn Westcott. See also R. A. Gilbert, ed., *The Sorcerer and His Apprentice: Unknown Hermetic Writings of S. L. MacGregor Mathers and J. W. Brodie-Innes* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983).

15. See Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, *Fortune-Telling Cards. The Tarot, Its Occult Signification . . . and Methods of Play* (London: George Redway, 1888); trans. and ed., *The Key of Solomon the King: Clavicula Salomonis* (1888; London: George Redway, 1889); *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage* (London: John Watkins, 1898); and *The Symbolism of the 4 Ancients* (London: privately printed, ca. 1903).

16. The 7° = 4° mottoes adopted by Westcott, MacGregor Mathers, and Woodman respectively were *Non Omnis Moriar* [I will not altogether die], *Deo Duce Comite Ferro* [With God as my leader and the sword as my companion], and *Vincit Omnia Veritas* [Truth rules all].

17. I am indebted to several reliable and relatively recent studies of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn that have helped to throw light on its organizational structure and membership. Particularly valuable because they include or draw upon privately printed and unpublished sources, and are written by scholarly enthusiasts (rather than enthusiastic occultists), are Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*; R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983); and R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn Companion: A Guide to the History, Structure, and Workings of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1986). W. B. Yeats scholarship has been enormously helpful in unraveling the complexities of the Golden Dawn and contextualizing it in literary and intellectual terms. See, for early influential examples, Virginia Moore, *The Unicorn: William Butler Yeats' Search for Reality* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954) and George Mills Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1974). More recently, the work of Warwick Gould and Deirdre Toomey has contributed to our understanding of both Yeats and his occult world. See, for example, Warwick Gould, "'The Music of Heaven': Dorothea Hunter," *Yeats Annual* No. 9, ed. Deirdre Toomey (London: Macmillan, 1992), 132–88.

18. Egyptian hieroglyphics had been deciphered earlier in the century, and it is highly likely that MacGregor Mathers used a translation of a papyrus held in the British Museum for some of the central aspects of the Neophyte ritual. See *Fragment of a Graeco-Egyptian Work upon Magic, from a Papyrus in the British Museum*, ed. with a trans. by C. W. G. [Charles Wycliffe Goodwin] (Cambridge: Cambridge Antiquarian Society, 1851).

19. The Second Order assumed a life of its own under the control of MacGregor Mathers in 1892, but for many occultists the history of the Golden Dawn is the history of the Second Order because (as we shall see) it was here that the principles and practice of magic were taught. For the sake of clarity and brevity I follow the usual practice of referring to both the First and Second Orders as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

20. See Israel Regardie, *The Golden Dawn: An Account of the Teachings, Rites and Ceremonies of the Order of the Golden Dawn*, 4th ed., 4 vols. (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 1971), for an informed account and reproduction of the Golden Dawn rituals and "knowledge" imparted by the Order. This edition (and its subsequent printings) brings together the four separate volumes of the original 1937–40 edition, and constitutes the most important, comprehensive, and reliable published source of Golden Dawn documents. Regardie was introduced to a version of Golden Dawn teachings as a young man when he was associated with one of the Order's most legendary members, Aleister Crowley. Crowley is the subject of chapter 6 in the present

text. For Regardie's life and work, see Gerald Suster, *Crowley's Apprentice: The Life and Ideas of Israel Regardie* (London: Rider & Co Ltd, 1989).

21. See W. B. Yeats, "Autobiography" (written in draft form, 1916–17), in *Memoirs*, transcribed and ed. Denis Donoghue (London: Macmillan, 1972), 23–24. R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 103, presents a somewhat different account of Yeats's severance from the Theosophical Society.

22. For a handwritten list of members of the new Chiswick Lodge, see Gerald Yorke Collection, The Warburg Institute, London University, "New Listing" #97. The inaugural meeting of the Lodge was held on 10 January 1891 and was preceded by several lectures given at the home of Frederick Leigh Gardner, a resident of Chiswick who was initiated into the Second Order of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1895.

23. John Todhunter produced one of his plays, *A Sicilian Idyll*, featuring H. M. Paget and Florence Farr, at the Bedford Park playhouse in 1890.

24. Other senior members of the Golden Dawn with Bedford Park connections included Dorothea Hunter (née Butler), her husband, Edmund Arthur Hunter, and the Theosophist Isabelle de Steiger.

25. The connections between "alternative" medicine and different forms of occultism are deep rooted. Dr. Edward Berridge, Dr. Charles Lloyd Tuckey, and Dr. Robert Masters Theobald were members of the Order who practiced homeopathy. For the remainder of the Theobald family and its association with spiritualism, see Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), chap. 4.

26. See Arthur Edward Waite, *Shadows of Life and Thought: A Retrospective Review in the Form of Memoirs* (London: Selwyn and Blount, 1938), for an autobiographical account of his life; and R. A. Gilbert, *A. E. Waite: Magician of Many Parts* (Wellingborough: Crucible, 1987).

27. Westcott made this veiled reference to the Golden Dawn at a meeting of the Metropolitan College of the Soc. Ros. on 11 October 1888. See Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 45–46.

28. For the membership lists of the Golden Dawn and its offshoots, see R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn Companion*, 124–75; and Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 49, for a chart showing the total numbers of initiations in all Golden Dawn Temples broken down by year and sex.

29. Mina Bergson married MacGregor Mathers in June 1890, and stayed with the Aytons while the Banns were being called.

30. Yeats, "Autobiography," 21. See also Foster, *W. B. Yeats*, 80. Conversely, Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1949), 77, states that Yeats met Wilde early in 1889. Constance Wilde was distantly related to Lady Mount-Temple, an ardent spiritualist who was deeply interested in unorthodox spirituality. For a brief reference to the "mystical" life of Constance Wilde, see Natasha Gray, "Constance Wilde: A Modest Mystic," *Cauda Pavonis: Studies in Hermeticism*, n.s., 9, no. 1 (spring 1990), 1–4.

31. For Annie Horniman, see Sheila Goodie, *Annie Horniman: A Pioneer in the Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1990); Adrian Frazier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman, and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); James W. Flannery, *Miss Annie F. Horniman and the Abbey Theatre* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1970); and Rex Pogson, *Miss Horniman and the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester* (London: Rockliff, 1952). Adrian Frazier is particularly caustic on the subject of Horniman, but it is clear from Foster's *W. B. Yeats* that she was deeply emotionally invested in the Abbey Theatre and attempted to control the endeavor.

32. See Josephine Johnson, *Florence Farr: Bernard Shaw's 'New Woman'* (Gerrards Cross: Colin

Smythe Ltd., 1975), 42, who states that after his death Yeats's widow implied that Yeats and Farr had a brief affair during these early years. The affair with Shaw is not in doubt.

33. Josephine Johnson provides a useful account of Florence Farr's life and career but is less helpful on Farr's engagement with magic and the occult. Margot Peters, *Bernard Shaw and the Actresses* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1980), draws on Johnson's book for many of the autobiographical details but puts Florence Farr's theatrical career into context.

34. Letter from George Bernard Shaw to Florence Farr, 15 September 1903, in Clifford Bax, ed., *Florence Farr Bernard Shaw W. B. Yeats Letters* (London: Home and Van Thal Ltd., 1948), 17–18, regarding Farr's proposal to publish a book on the Indian Rig-Vedas. Florence Farr entrusted Bax with a box containing the letters when she left England for Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1912, with instructions that it was not to be opened until after her death.

35. W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1955; reprint, London: The Macmillan, Press, 1961), "The Trembling of the Veil," 122, 123; page references are to the reprint edition. Florence Farr was living at 123 Dalling Road in the London suburb of Brook Green during this period. Yeats's *The Trembling of the Veil* was published in 1922 and subsequently incorporated in *Autobiographies*.

36. For Florence Farr's comments, see [Florence Farr] S. S. D. D., "An Introduction to Alchemy and Notes" in *A Short Enquiry concerning the Hermetic Art* by a Lover of Philalethes, preface by Non Omnis Moriar [William Wynn Westcott] (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1894), 10.

37. See Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters 1874–1897*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1972), 504.

38. Isabelle de Steiger, *Memorabilia: Reminiscences of a Woman Artist and Scholar* (London: Rider & Co., 1927), 310.

39. Moira Mathers, preface to the fourth edition of S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *Kabbala Denudata*, viii.

40. See Foster, *W. B. Yeats*, 98–101.

41. Letter to John O'Leary, week ending 23 July 1892, in W. B. Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (New York: Octagon Books, 1980), 211.

42. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, "The Trembling of the Veil," 182–83.

43. A. E. Waite's comments were made in the context of his unsigned obituary of MacGregor Mathers, again, long after the event and when Waite had long since abandoned magic for Christian mysticism. For the obituary, see *The Occult Review* (April 1919): 197–99.

44. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, "The Trembling of the Veil," 187.

45. See Gould, "The Music of Heaven," 151–58.

46. See Foster, *W. B. Yeats*, passim, for reference to Yeats's proposals for a Celtic Mystical Order and his more general involvement with the Celtic revival.

47. A. P. Sinnett, *The Occult World* (London: Trübner & Co., 1881), 12.

48. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1911; 12th ed., New York: E. P. Dutton & Company Inc., 1930), 153.

49. For the early experiments and subsequent experiences, see Foster, *W. B. Yeats*, 51, 462–69. Yeats became heavily involved with spiritualist "automatic" or "passive" writing shortly after his marriage to Bertha Georgie ("George") Hyde-Lees in 1917. See George Mills Harper, *The Making of Yeats's A Vision*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1987); Margaret Mills Harper, "The Medium as Creator: George Yeats's Role in the Automatic Script," *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies* 6 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 49–72; and Brenda Maddox, *George's Ghosts: A New Life of W. B. Yeats* (London: Picador, 1999).

50. His interest was apparently short lived and he allowed his membership to lapse. For an account of William Crookes's spiritualist activities see Owen, *The Darkened Room*, chap. 3 and *passim*.

51. Israel Regardie, "Neophyte Ritual," in *The Golden Dawn* (1982 printing), vol. 2, bk. 2, 32–33.

52. Wynn Westcott notes the history of the second Order in his pamphlet, *Data of the History of the Rosicrucians* (1916), cited by Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 75.

53. See Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 82–84, for a description of the Vault.

54. Some of the Golden Dawn documents remain in private collections, but most of the Flying Rolls have been published in Francis King, ed., *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy*. . . (London: Neville Spearman, 1971).

55. See Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 93–94.

56. *Ibid.*, 91–103, provides a synopsis of members' activities as briefly recorded in two Second Order diaries, one of which was a signing-in book in which initiates stated their name and business. On p. 61, n. 1, Howe notes that George Cecil Jones, who entered the Golden Dawn in 1895, told John Symonds (biographer of Aleister Crowley) that the Golden Dawn was "a club, like any other club, a place to pass the time in and meet one's friends." Symonds in turn observed, "If it was a club, it was a very unusual sort of club."

57. Mathers's introductory remarks in his *Kabbala Denudata* were also indebted to Ginsburg. See Christian David Ginsburg, *The Kabbalah: Its Doctrines, Development, and Literature* (London, Liverpool [printed], 1865). According to de Steiger, *Memorabilia*, 171, Ginsburg's book was equally esteemed in the Hermetic Society and Theosophical Society. He was astonished, however, when de Steiger told him (during a dinner at which Anna Kingsford was also present) that his book was read by nonscholarly acquaintances of hers.

58. Moina MacGregor Mathers, preface to the fourth edition of S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *Kabbala Denudata*, viii–ix. See also [William Wynn Westcott, "Sapere Aude"] S. A., "The Condition Needed for Entry into the Second Order," in R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn*, 126–29. The sole difference between "black" and "white" magic is the end to which the magical operation is directed.

59. See Regardie, introduction to *The Golden Dawn* (1982 printing), 93–94; see vol. 3, bk. 4, p. 56 for an illustration of the Rose Cross Lamén, and pp. 54–56 for the detailed coloration of the Lamén. The Lamén is in many respects typical of the eclecticism of MacGregor Mathers's Order, drawing as it does on an array of occult symbolism. According to Frank Kinahan, *Yeats, Folklore, and Occultism* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 167 n. 31, the Lamén's design was taken from the anonymous *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, first published in 1785. See *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians: An Exact Reproduction of the Original, but with the German Text and Terms Literally Translated* (Chicago: Aries Press, 1939).

60. See, for example, Regardie, *The Golden Dawn* (1982 printing), vol. 3, bk. 4, pp. 37–45, for the making and consecration of the Lotus Wand. Book 4 deals with the primary techniques of magical practice and the rituals for consecrating magical implements.

61. Moina MacGregor Mathers, preface to the 1926 edition of S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *Kabbala Denudata*, viii–ix.

62. From the Tiphereth clause of the Adeptus Minor Obligation. See Regardie, *The Golden Dawn* (1982 printing), vol. 2, bk. 3, p. 214.

63. See, for example, [Anna (Bonus) Kingsford and Edward Maitland], *The Perfect Way; or, The Finding of Christ* (London: Field & Tuer, 1882), 221, 230.

64. [Moina Mathers], Flying Roll No. 21, "'Know Thyself,' Address to the Zelator Adepti

Minores of the Order R. R. et A. C. by Vestigia Nulla Retrorsum $6^{\circ} = 5^{\circ}$,” reproduced in F. King, ed., *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy*, 137–45.

65. The incident involving Dr. Berridge is considered briefly in chapter 3 of the present text.

66. Letter of 17 March 1897 from S[apere] Aude (Westcott) to Frederick Leigh Gardner, cited in Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 165. Howe (166) conjectures that MacGregor Mathers had himself instigated this coup against Westcott in a bid for total authority within the Golden Dawn. Gardner was a member of the R. R. et A. C.

67. Letter of 16 February 1900 from Deo Duce Comite Ferro (MacGregor Mathers) to S. S. D. D. (Farr), cited in *ibid.*, 210 (original emphasis). The letter from Farr that sparked this response has apparently not survived.

68. See an open letter of 17 January 1901 from Sapientia Sapienti Dono Date [Florence Farr] to Sub spe [J. W. Brodie-Innes], reproduced in G. M. Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn*, 221–23, citing MacGregor Mathers's approval of her “Egyptian” orientation and denying that she worked “‘at clairvoyance or divination in any special way.’”

69. See Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 200–202, who cites two contemporary accounts of a public performance of the Rite of Isis given in Paris in March 1899.

70. See [Florence Farr:] S. S. D. D., *Egyptian Magic: An Essay on the Nature and Applications of Magical Practices in Pharaonic and Ptolemaic Egypt* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896; reprint, with an introduction by Timothy D'Arch Smith, Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1982). The “Egyptian” plays, *The Shrine of the Golden Hawk* and *The Beloved of Hathor*, were performed during 1901–2 by a cast that included Florence Farr and her sister's (Paget) family. See Gould, “‘The Music of Heaven,’” 167–70; Johnson, *Florence Farr*, 90–91; and Foster, *W. B. Yeats*, 259.

71. Letter of 7 October 1907 from W. B. Yeats to Florence Farr, in Bax, ed., *Florence Farr . . . Letters*, 60.

72. Foster, *W. B. Yeats*, 242, observes that while Yeats had his eye on Horniman as a potential backer of his theatrical ventures, he genuinely supported her position.

73. G. M. Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn*, 259–68, reproduces Yeats's “Is the Order of R. R. et A. C. to Remain a Magical Order?” and provides an analysis of the document and its repercussions (69–91).

74. The Horos trial is briefly considered in chapter 3 of the present text.

75. The Order became known as the Hermetic Society of the M. R. [Morgenröthe] in June 1902.

76. Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 251, notes that Dr. R. W. Felkin, who became prominent in the leadership of the Order about this time, wrote a memorandum in which he stated that Annie Horniman “‘believes that she is in touch with the Third Order . . . and that she, although not recognised, is really the Chief of the Order.’”

77. Foster, *W. B. Yeats*, 286, considers Horniman to have had romantic designs on Yeats, and cites as evidence “flirtatious accounts of Tarot divinations” that were in fact written just after her resignation from the Golden Dawn. Foster might be right, but among Golden Dawn Adepts messages such as “work for love brings Divine Wisdom” were often very far from romantic in intent.

78. Arthur Edward Waite provides a somewhat inaccurate version of these events in *Shadows of Life and Thought*, 227–30. R. A. Gilbert, *A. E. Waite*, 116–23, provides a brief account and reproduces (179–80) the Constitution of Waite's R. R. et A. C. of 7 November 1903. R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn Companion*, 169–75, reproduces the membership lists of the R. R. et A. C.

79. Waite finally dissolved his Isis-Urania Temple in 1914 amid much bickering, and in July 1915 instituted the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross as a Rosicrucian and Christian Order with different rituals and organizational structure.

80. Ponnambalam Ramanathan had earlier employed the Theosophist and Golden Dawn magician Allan Bennett as tutor to his sons. For Allan Bennett, see chapter 1, note 48, and chapter 6, note 12. Florence Farr died of breast cancer in 1917 at the age of fifty-six in Ceylon.

81. Moina Mathers, preface to the fourth edition of S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *Kabbala Denudata*, vii–viii.

Chapter Three

1. Karl Pearson, “Woman and Labour,” *Fortnightly Review* 129 (May 1894): 561, cited in Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), 7.

2. Aubrey Beardsley was art editor for *The Yellow Book* before moving on to *The Savoy*, and his unsettling illustrations quickly became the symbols of a perverse sensibility that characterized “the decadence.” *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy*, both new periodicals of the mid-1890s, encapsulated much of this spirit of the fin de siècle. Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, develops the theme of a fin-de-siècle crisis of sexuality.

3. See Sally Ledger, “The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism,” in *Cultural Politics at the Fin De Siècle*, ed. Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 26; and Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women* (London: John Murray, 1993), 43.

4. See, for example, Marie Corelli’s best-selling novel, *The Sorrows of Satan* (London: Methuen, 1895).

5. Grant Allen, *The Woman Who Did* (London: J. Lane, 1895) and Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* (London: William Heinemann, 1893). Grand was probably the first to use the term *New Woman*. See her essay “The New Aspect of the Woman Question,” *North American Review* 158 (1894): 271–73.

6. Ledger, “The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism,” addresses these issues.

7. Tricia Davis, Martin Durham, Catherine Hall, Mary Langan, and David Sutton, “‘The Public Face of Feminism’: Early Twentieth-Century Writings on Women’s Suffrage,” in *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics*, ed. Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwartz, and David Sutton (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 311–12, noted the strong “consciousness of an ‘alternative world’ ” among active feminists during this period, and the lack of historical work attempting to explain it. For an early exploratory essay on this theme, see Diana Burfield, “Theosophy and Feminism: Some Explorations in Nineteenth Century Biography,” in *Women’s Religious Experience*, ed. Pat Holden (London: Croom Helm, 1983). Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), addresses the question directly. She considers the relationship between feminism and Theosophy in rich detail, and argues convincingly for the importance of the “new” spirituality in the development of feminist thought in Britain during the thirty-year period before the outbreak of war.

8. There were, for example, persistent rumors about the effeminacy of Daniel Dunglas Home, one of the most celebrated of the Victorian spiritualist mediums. For homosexuality and Anglo and Roman Catholicism, see David Hilliard, “UnEnglish and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality,” *Victorian Studies* 25, no. 2 (winter 1982): 181–210; and Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

9. [William Wynn Westcott], S[apere] A[aude], “The Condition Needed for Entry into

the Second Order,” in R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983), 127 (original emphasis); and [Evelyn Underhill], Mrs. Stuart Moore, “The Magic and Mysticism of To-Day,” *Hibbert Journal* 6 (January 1908): 374.

10. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1911; 12th ed., New York: E. P. Dutton & Company Inc., 1930), 71.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Josephine Johnson, *Florence Farr: Bernard Shaw's 'New Woman'* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Ltd., 1975), 72, in a less than even-handed treatment, states that Yeats “required a spiritual as well as an occult mythology . . . to engender his flights of the imagination. For Florence, Magic was, above all, a necessary anodyne for her often troubled, searching personality.”

13. Florence Farr, *A Short Enquiry Concerning the Hermetic Art* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1894), 10.

14. Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order, 1887–1923* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 66, in speaking of Annie Horniman, states: “It may be noted that decisions to join occult or esoteric Orders are not uncommon in the case of women experiencing emotional difficulties.” R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 101–2, passes similar judgment when he says that the Theosophical Society and Golden Dawn “acted as magnets for the frustrated as well as the credulous,” and explicitly links this with the “high proportion of unconventional woman acolytes.”

15. Draft letter of 15 November 1946 from Dorothea Hunter to Richard Ellmann, quoted in Warwick Gould, “‘The Music of Heaven’: Dorothea Hunter,” in *Yeats Annual* No. 9, ed. Deirdre Toomey (London: Macmillan, 1992), 142.

16. See William Wynn Westcott, “The Religion of Freemasonry,” *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 1 (1886–88): 55–58, reprinted in *The Magical Mason: Forgotten Hermetic Writings of William Wynn Westcott, Physician and Magus*, ed. R. A. Gilbert (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983), 122; and S. L. MaGregor Mathers, *Kabbala Denudata. The Kabbala Unveiled* (1887; 4th ed., London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1926), introduction, 25.

17. Letter of 16 February 1898 from T. H. Pattinson (Imperator of the Horus Temple) to F. L. Gardner, copy held in the Gerald Yorke Collection, The Warburg Institute, University of London, “New Listing” 9. “T” appears to be the copyist. The Horus Temple had had its own problems several years earlier, and William Wynn Westcott had temporarily taken over its leadership in an attempt to restore order.

18. Although there was a clearly articulated progressive spiritualist platform in Britain, the star female mediums of the 1870s were not closely associated with the espousal of women's rights. For the rather differently configured American movement, see Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

19. Edward Maitland, *Anna Kingsford: Her Life, Letters, Diary and Work*, 3d ed. (London: J. M. Watkins, 1913), 1:3. Subsequent page references are to this edition. Maitland gives a full account of Kingsford's early life in the first volume.

20. *Ibid.*, 1:11. Maitland reproduces a lengthy excerpt from Miss F. J. Theobald's diary in which she describes early séances with “Annie Bonus” as she was known prior to her marriage. For Florence Theobald (and the spiritualist experiences of the Theobald family) see Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), chap. 4. Florence Theobald's reference to “a petition” is evidence that Annie Bonus was involved in the struggle during the 1860s for legislation to give married women control of their own property.

21. Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 1:13.
22. See *ibid.*, 1:32.
23. The University of Paris opened its medical degrees to women in the late 1860s, and Elizabeth Garrett (later Anderson) famously obtained her M.D. diploma there in 1870. London University finally accepted women candidates for degrees in all subjects in 1877, but by that time Anna Kingsford had already been studying in France for several years. She was finally awarded her M.D. by the medical faculty of the University of Paris in 1880. Her medical thesis on vegetarianism was published in England as *The Perfect Way in Diet; a Treatise Advocating a Return to the Natural and Ancient Food of Our Race* (London: Paul, Trench, 1881).
24. Ellen Marryat was the sister of the dashing naval hero and prolific author Captain Frederick Marryat, and therefore aunt to his daughter Florence (later Mrs. Ross Church, then Mrs. Lean), herself a writer and noted spiritualist. See, for example, Florence Marryat, *There Is No Death* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1891).
25. See Annie Besant, *Annie Besant; an autobiography* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), 5, 81.
26. The first five chapters of Anne Taylor's *Annie Besant: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) give a concise account of Besant's early years and troubled marriage.
27. Frank Besant later reneged on the agreement that his wife would have custody of Mabel, and after a bitter legal tussle Annie Besant effectively lost both her children to their father until they were of an age to act independently. Her plight highlights the problems faced by women before the passing of the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, which recognized a married woman's independent legal status; and the Guardianship of Infants Act, 1886, which eroded the assumed paternal right to custody.
28. Besant and Bradlaugh were tried under the Obscene Publications Act for their publication of an earlier tract by Charles Knowlton entitled *Fruits of Philosophy*. They added a preface and a new subtitle. See Charles Knowlton, *Fruits of Philosophy: An Essay on the Population Question* (London: Freethought Publishing Co., 1877). A sentence of six months in prison for both Bradlaugh and Besant was commuted, and Bradlaugh paid a fine of £100 on behalf of them both.
29. Annie Besant, *The Law of Population: Its Consequences, and Its Bearing upon Human Conduct and Morals* (London: Freethought Publishing Co., 1877).
30. Hemming, *Law Reports; National Reformer*, special issue, 2 June 1878, cited in A. Taylor, *Annie Besant*, 132.
31. Annie Besant, *Marriage; as it was, as it is, and as it should be* (n.p., [1878]), 18–19.
32. See, Arthur H. Nethercot, *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant* (London: Hart-Davis, 1961), 106; and A. Taylor, *Annie Besant*, 124–25, 184–86.
33. George Bernard Shaw, "An Explanatory Word from Mr. Shaw," in *Florence Farr Bernard Shaw W. B. Yeats Letters*, ed. Clifford Bax (London: Home and Van Thal Ltd., 1948), ix. Shaw thought that Florence Farr had already experienced twelve "adventures" by the time he met her.
34. George Yeats (Yeats's later wife) states that Yeats quoted this phrase of Florence Farr's. See George Yeats, "A Forward to the Letters of W. B. Yeats," in *Florence Farr Bernard Shaw W. B. Yeats Letters*, ed. Clifford Bax (London: Home and Van Thal Ltd., 1948), 33–34. See, also, W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1955; reprint, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1961), "The Trembling of the Veil," 122; page reference is to the reprint edition. Bax's edited volume gives a clear insight into Farr's relationship with both Shaw and Yeats.
35. Florence Farr, *The Dancing Faun* (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1894), 49–50.

36. Florence Farr, *The Solemnization of Jacklin: Some Adventures on the Search for Reality* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1912), 241. It is dangerous to assume that fictional characters are the mere mouthpieces for an author's opinions, but Florence Farr's novels did contain a good deal of loosely autobiographical attitudes and interests. The themes and some of the dialogue in this novel closely resemble her 1907–8 journalism on related subjects for the *New Age*.

37. Farr, *The Dancing Faun*, 91–2. The novel was produced as part of the publisher's Key Note series, and features an Aubrey Beardsley frontispiece.

38. Florence Farr, *Modern Woman: Her Intentions* (London: Frank Palmer, 1910).

39. See Nethercot, *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant*, 361; and A. Taylor, *Annie Besant*, 251–52. According to Nethercot, *ibid.*, Besant returned to the Malthusian League in later life.

40. For Besant's Theosophical position on birth control, see Annie Besant, *Theosophy and the Law of Population* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896).

41. B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and Its Development in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 72, points out that traditional occult interest in chastity might have been concerned as much with the magical implications of seminal retention as it was with a valorization of virginity in and of itself.

42. Editorial, "Mysticism, True and False," *Lucifer* 9 (September 1891–February 1892): 177–81.

43. Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 1:408–9, details these and related spiritual teachings received by Kingsford during sleep. Kingsford's testament suggests that in modern occultism virginity or chastity was prized because it was an indicator of the supreme self-control of the Adept. For Kingsford's awareness of the rumors surrounding her relationship with Edward Maitland, see her letter to her friend Lady Caithness, 5 April 1882, in *ibid.*, 2:55–56.

44. [Westcott], S[apere] A[aude], "The Condition Needed for Entry into the Second Order," 127 (original emphasis); and letter from Vestigia (Moina MacGregor Mathers) to Fortiter (Annie Horniman), 31 December 1895, quoted in Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 118.

45. See Owen, *The Darkened Room*, 27–40, for a consideration of these issues in relation to British spiritualism. For an example of a Swedenborgian attempt to resist unorthodox spiritualist interpretations of the seer, see William H. Holcombe, M.D., *The Sexes Here and Hereafter* (London: James Spiers, 1869).

46. For the standard biography, see Herbert Wallace Schneider and George Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim: Being the Incredible History of Thomas Lake Harris and Laurence Oliphant; their Sexual Mysticism and Utopian Communities Amply Documented to Confound the Skeptic* (New York: Columbia Studies in American Culture, 1942). See also Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 65 and n. 2.

47. Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 1:269. For Oliphant's ideas, see, for example, Laurence Oliphant, *Sympneumata; or, Evolutionary Forces Now Active in Man* (Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, 1885) and Anne Taylor, *Laurence Oliphant, 1829–1888* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

48. Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 2:57, who cites Kingsford's letter to *Light*, 8 April 1882.

49. See Nethercot, *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant*, 368, 399–400.

50. See [Florence Farr:] S. S. D. D., Flying Roll No. 13, "Secrecy and Hermetic Love," in *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy . . . Being Hitherto Unpublished Golden Dawn Material*, ed. Francis King (London: Neville Spearman, 1971), 149–52.

51. Letter from Vestigia (Moina MacGregor Mathers) to Fortiter (Annie Horniman), 31 December 1895, quoted in Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 118.

52. Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 1:408.

53. Israel Regardie, *What You Should Know about the Golden Dawn* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Falcon

Press, 1985), 29–31, reviews and discounts old allegations that the Golden Dawn offered instruction on the subject of sex magic. Ithell Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom: MacGregor Mathers and “The Golden Dawn”* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1975), 285–97, conjectures that there was such teaching. Ithell Colquhoun, although of a much younger generation, had Golden Dawn connections. Mary K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester, Vt.: Park Street Press, 1995), 342 and 451 n. 17, argues that there are oblique references in Florence Farr’s writings which bear out suggestions that the Golden Dawn did teach some form of sexual magic to advanced initiates. Sex magic is considered in chapter 6 in the present text.

54. Letter from Deo Duce Comite Ferro (S. L. MacGregor Mathers) to Fortiter et Recte (Annie Horniman), 8 January 1896, quoted in Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 123 (original emphasis). It is not clear what is meant by “Elemental marriage.” See also Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom*, 293–94, for reference to the Elemental spouse in what is probably the same case.

55. Letter from Vestigia (Moina MacGregor Mathers) to Fortiter (Annie Horniman), 31 December 1895, quoted in Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 117–18 (original emphasis).

56. Letter from Deo Duce Comite Ferro (S. L. MacGregor Mathers) to Fortiter et Recte (Annie Horniman), 8 January 1896, quoted in *ibid.*, 122–3 (original emphasis).

57. Letter from Deo Duce Comite Ferro (S. L. MacGregor Mathers) to Fortiter et Recte (Annie Horniman), 8 January 1896, quoted in *ibid.*, 122 (original emphasis).

58. For Berridge’s homeopathic credentials from the Homoeopathic College of Pennsylvania, see the title page of the second edition of his *Materia Medica*: Edward William Berridge, *Complete Repertory to the Homoeopathic Materia Medica* (London: Alfred Heath, 1873).

59. See, for example, Respiro, *The Brotherhood of the New Life: An Epitome of the Works and Teachings of Thomas Lake Harris*, 2d ed., 5 vols. (London: E. W. Allen, 1897). This work was reissued in a multivolume edition by C. W. Pearce and Co. of Glasgow during 1914–17. For “Respiro,” see also Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 119–20 and n. 1. Howe is cautious as to identity, but the bibliography of R. A. Gilbert’s book *The Golden Dawn Companion: A Guide to the History, Structure, and Workings of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1986), 188, names Dr. Edward Berridge as “Respiro.” Gilbert is invariably a highly reliable source.

60. A draft letter to MacGregor Mathers, quoted in Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 120–21. Howe dates this letter 2 January 1895, but it was probably written on 2 January 1896.

61. Mrs. Helen Mary Rand (Vigilate) had become a 5° = 6° in the Second Order in 1892, and was later to support the “Secret Groups” during the controversy that erupted after the turn of the century. She joined A. E. Waite’s Independent and Rectified Order after its constitution in 1903.

62. Letter of 9 May 1902 from William Wynn Westcott to F. L. Gardner, quoted in Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 240. On pp. 239–40, Howe briefly considers the Horos scandal; Francis King, *Modern Ritual Magic*, 79–93, provides a more detailed account. For an earlier discussion of the Horoses and the trial by an individual well acquainted with the occult world, see Eric John Dingwall, *Some Human Oddities: Studies in the Queer, the Uncanny and the Fanatical* (London: Home & Van Thal, 1947).

63. See open letter of 9 June 1906 from Annie Besant to Theosophical Society members in which she refers to Helen Dennis’s letter of 25 January 1906, Helen I. Dennis Collection on the Theosophical Society, Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library, box

2, folder 16. Mrs. Dennis's letter of January 25th., much referred to in other correspondence, is missing from the Dennis Collection. Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, 94, refers to a copy of the original letter held in the Archives of the Theosophical Society in England, London.

64. See Gregory Tillett, *The Elder Brother: A Biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 81, who cites a sworn statement made by one of the boys, Douglas Pettit. Pettit apparently also swore later that he and Leadbeater had had sexual relations. Much of the original documentation in the Leadbeater case was published in *Evolution of Mrs Besant*, by the Editor of "Justice," Madras [Dr. T. M. Nair] (Madras: Justice Printing Works, 1918). For more recent accounts, see Tillett, *The Elder Brother*, 77–90; and A. Taylor, *Annie Besant*, 283–85. Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, chap. 4, considers the Leadbeater affair and deals with its broader Theosophical connotations.

65. See, for their views, Herbert Burrows and G. R. S. Mead, *The Leadbeater Case: The Suppressed Speeches of Herbert Burrows and G. R. S. Mead at the Annual Convention of the British Section of the Theosophical Society, July 4th and 5th, 1908* (London: privately printed, 1908) and George Robert Stow Mead, *The Leadbeater Case: A Reply to the President's [Annie Besant's] Letter of November 1908* [by G. R. S. Mead, H. Burrows, W. Kingsland and Edith Ward], (London: privately printed, 1908). The Leadbeater case later returned to haunt the Theosophical Society when he was accused in 1912 of an improper relationship with his young Indian charge and protégé, Jiddu Krishnamurti, by the father of the boy. Accusations of mutual masturbation (and rumors of sodomy) with boys followed Leadbeater into the 1920s.

66. For an overview, see Lesley A. Hall, "Forbidden by God, Despised by Men: Masturbation, Medical Warnings, Moral Panic, and Manhood in Great Britain, 1850–1950," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 3 (1992): 365–87.

67. Transcript of the 1906 committee hearing, published in [Nair], *Evolution of Mrs Besant*, app. 1, xviii; and Tillett, *The Elder Brother*, 85. When pressed by Olcott, "Is it [the teaching of masturbation] found in the Catholic Church?" Leadbeater replied, "I expect so" ([Nair], *Evolution of Mrs Besant*, xix).

68. Josephine Ransom, *A Short History of the Theosophical Society* (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1938), 358. Mrs. Ransom, a Theosophist who had access to archival material, cites as her source a letter of 19 March 1907 from Leadbeater to Besant.

69. See Francis King, *Sexuality, Magic and Perversion* (London: Neville Spearman, 1971), 98; Kenneth Grant, *The Magical Revival* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1973), 27–28; and Nevill Drury and Gregory Tillett, *The Occult Sourcebook* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 79. F. King, *Sexuality, Magic and Perversion*, 122–41, however, does not accept that Leadbeater used homosexual acts as part of his magical practice. For a final consideration of these issues in relation to Leadbeater, see Tillett, *The Elder Brother*, 279–85. Chapter 6 in the present text picks them up in relation to Aleister Crowley.

70. An undated letter from Mr. N. D. Khandalwalla to Annie Besant, quoted in [Nair], *Evolution of Mrs Besant*, 128–29.

71. Natasha Gray, "Constance Wilde: A Modest Mystic," *Cauda Pavonis: Studies in Hermeticism*, n.s., 9, no. 1 (spring 1990): 3, suggests that accounts of the Theosophical Society prior to Blavatsky's death are full of such hints. There is certainly evidence to suggest that sex radicals, homosexuals, and lesbians on both sides of the Atlantic were attracted to Theosophy and the occult. See Jonathan Ned Katz, ed., *Gay / Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1994), 250–54, 305; and Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885–1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1995), 164–68.

72. Evelyn Sharp, *Unfinished Adventure* (London: John Lane, 1933), 58; cited in Bland, *Ban-*

ishing the Beast, 288. Sharp's comment is the more noteworthy because she knew Aubrey Beardsley and moved in *Yellow Book* circles.

73. Nethercot, *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant*, 300; Isabelle de Steiger, *Memorabilia: Reminiscences of a Woman Artist and Scholar*, 85–86; and Ransom, *A Short History of the Theosophical Society*, 198. The Wilde family also attended spiritualist séances.

74. Sexology was introduced in Britain by Havelock Ellis's multivolume work, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, published as an 8-volume set (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Co., 1910). The first of these volumes was coauthored with John Addington Symonds and entitled *Sexual Inversion* (London: Wilson & Macmillan, 1897). Also groundbreaking was Dr. Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study* (Stuttgart, 1886; trans. of the 7th German ed. by C. G. Chaddock [Philadelphia and London: F. A. Davis Co., 1892]).

75. Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1908). See also Edward Carpenter, *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk: A Study in Social Evolution* (London: S. Clarke, 1914).

76. Carpenter's "intermediate sex" is invariably presented as male, but women reading his work often realized for the first time that they themselves belonged in this category. See Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 291–92.

77. [Westcott], "The Condition Needed for Entry into the Second Order," 129 (original emphasis).

78. See Joy Dixon, "Sexology and the Occult: Sexuality and Subjectivity in Theosophy's New Age," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7, no. 3 (1997): 409–33, for a consideration of these issues in relation to Theosophy. Chapter 6 in the present text develops the Aleister Crowley theme.

79. Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 1:353.

80. *Ibid.*, 1:189.

81. For a brief relevant discussion of the traditions of androgynous divinity and female Messianism, see Owen, *The Darkened Room*, 12–17. See, for a more developed analysis of the British context, J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780–1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) and Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago Press, 1983).

82. Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, *Kabbala Denudata: The Kabbala Unveiled* (1887; 4th ed., London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1926), introduction, 21, 25 (original emphasis).

83. See Westcott, "The Religion of Freemasonry," 55–58.

84. For fin-de-siècle French magic / occultism, which was much less "respectable" in tone, see Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (London: Rider and Company, 1972) and Robert Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France: Joséphin Péladan and the Salons de la Rose-Croix* (New York: Garland Pub., 1976).

85. See the review in the *British Medical Journal* (26 June 1909): 1546–47, quoted in Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 264.

86. The *Salomé* production was privately staged by The New Stage Club, thus circumventing the prohibition of public performances of a play having a biblical theme. See Johnson, *Florence Farr*, 116–17; and Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, 150. Showalter argues that the play (written by Wilde in French and subsequently translated by him) "became a closet drama, both in the sense of a play existing primarily as a text and also . . . in the contemporary sense of a heterosexual play by a homosexual writer that has a gay sexual subtext."

87. Letter of 7 June 1906 from Annie Besant to Mrs. Helen Dennis, Helen I. Dennis Collection on the Theosophical Society, Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library, box 2, folder 14. Besant referred to the incident again in her open letter of 9 June 1906 (see note 63 above).

Chapter Four

1. Arthur Edward Waite, *The Occult Sciences: A Compendium of Transcendental Doctrine and Experiment* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., 1891), 2.

2. For recent helpful accounts of the self in the Renaissance, early modern, and Enlightenment periods, see the essays in Roy Porter, ed., *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1997).

3. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1970), is the influential precursor of an important literature on the psychologized self. See, for example, Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1990) and Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

4. Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (1913; reprint, New York: Capricorn Books, 1966), 70–71, 132.

5. *Ibid.*, 27.

6. *Ibid.*, 132, 21.

7. *Ibid.*, 133.

8. Max Stirner's *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (1844) was published in English as *The Ego and His Own* in 1907 and became the basis for a Stirner revival in Britain. Stirner (whose work had languished in obscurity until the end of the nineteenth century) anticipated in extreme form some of the central ideas of Bergson and, more especially, Nietzsche.

9. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism," in *Modernism 1890–1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976; reprint, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), 22, 30, 32–33; page references are to the reprint edition. I am indebted to this seminal discussion of Modernism. Bradbury and McFarlane cite the distinguished critic Frank Kermode ("Modernisms," in *Modern Essays* [London, 1971]), as placing the antecedents of Modernism in the 1890s. Walter Pater's famous "Conclusion" to the first edition of *The Renaissance* (1873) was often read against the grain, and became an important influence on fin-de-siècle "decadence." See Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, 59–61.

10. August Strindberg, preface to *Miss Julie* (Stockholm: Seligmanns förlag, 1888), cited in James McFarlane, "The Mind of Modernism," in *Modernism 1890–1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976; reprint, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), 81; and Bradbury and McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism," 47. The work of Baudelaire, Ibsen, Maeterlink, and Strindberg exemplified this attention to a "disintegrated" modern subjectivity.

11. Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression, Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 2. See Ricardo J. Quinones, *Mapping Literary Modernism: Time and Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 249. The writers I have in mind here are Henry James, Yeats, Gide, and Proust followed by Eliot, Pound, Lawrence, and Joyce.

12. Virginia Woolf, *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1924), 4, suggests that "on or about December 1910 human character changed." She is arguing for a dis-

inction between the Edwardian and Georgian novelist. Richard Ellmann, “Two Faces of Edward,” in *Edwardians and Late Victorians*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 190, makes the point that “1900 is both more convenient and more accurate than Virginia Woolf’s 1910.”

13. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890–1930* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), *passim*.

14. David A. Hollinger, “The Knower and the Artificer, with Postscript 1993,” in *Modernist Impulses in the Human Sciences 1870–1930*, ed. Dorothy Ross (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 41, makes this point. He is quoting Paul de Man, who argues that modern thought “at its best” has been characterized by “the persistent attempt of a consciousness to reach an understanding of itself.” See Paul de Man, “What Is Modern?” *New York Review of Books*, 26 August 1965, p. 12.

15. The Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1882, and its first president was Henry Sidgwick, a prominent Cambridge philosopher. William James served as president of the society during 1894–95, and Sigmund Freud became a corresponding member in 1911. See chapter 1 for a brief mention of relations between the SPR and the Theosophical Society.

16. A minority of British spiritualists favored the idea of reincarnation as developed by the French spiritist Allan (sometimes Alain) Kardec, whose *Le Livre des Esprits* (1856) took a very different view of spiritual evolution from that prevalent in Britain and America.

17. H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*. . . (1889; reprint, London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1968), 130–36.

18. *Ibid.*, 131–35.

19. [Moina Mathers,] *Vestigia Nulla Retrorsum*, Flying Roll No. 21, “Know Thyself,” in *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy*. . . *Being Hitherto Unpublished Golden Dawn Material*, ed. Francis King (London: Neville Spearman, 1971), 137. “Know Thyself” was originally delivered as a lecture on 24 September 1893. Moina Mathers was married to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn’s “Chief,” Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, and was instrumental in the development of the Order’s teachings. The Flying Rolls were teaching documents prepared by high officials within the Order.

20. For the ceremonial invocation for spiritual development, see Israel Regardie, *The Golden Dawn: An Account of the Teachings, Rites and Ceremonies of the Order of the Golden Dawn*, 4th ed., 4 vols. (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 1971) (1982 printing), vol. 3, bk. 6, p. 252.

21. The call to “Know Thyself,” with its roots in antiquity, was an important goal of the Renaissance Hermetic tradition upon which the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn drew. [Moina Mathers,] “Know Thyself,” 137–45, establishes that the Adept must seek to understand and reconcile the “I” of three levels of consciousness: Human Consciousness, Spiritual Consciousnesses, and Divine Consciousnesses. See *ibid.*, 129–35, for Francis King’s helpful introduction to the Cabalistic basis of the esoteric psychology taught in the Golden Dawn as elaborated in Flying Roll No. 20, “Constitution of Man,” originally delivered as a lecture by Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers on 23 September 1893. Mary K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester, Vt.: Park Street Press, 1995), 134, also provides a brief and useful explanation of the Golden Dawn system.

22. See *Borderland* 1, no. 5 (July 1894), for the review of an anonymous pamphlet, *The Science of Alchemy: Spiritual and Material* (London: Theosophical Publishing Co., n.d.). It is noteworthy that the publisher of the pamphlet was the Theosophical Society.

23. See, for prewar examples, A. E. Waite, ed., *Lives of Alchemystical Philosophers, based on Materials Collected in 1815* (London: G. Redway, 1888); Charles John Samuel Thompson, *The Mys-*

tery and Romance of Alchemy and Pharmacy (London: Scientific Press, 1897); Matthew Moncrieff Pattison Muir, *The Story of Alchemy and the Beginnings of Chemistry* (London: George Newnes, 1902); and Herbert Stanley Redgrove, *Alchemy: Ancient and Modern* (London: William Rider & Son, 1911).

24. Isabelle de Steiger, *Memorabilia: Reminiscences of a Woman Artist and Scholar* (London: Rider & Co., 1927), 237–38. Madame de Steiger visited Mrs. Atwood when she was an old widow living alone in Yorkshire, and met her again at the home of A. P. Sinnett. For Mrs. Atwood's book (published under her maiden name), see Mary Anne South, *A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery* (London: Trelawny Saunders, 1850). Apparently both Mead and A. E. Waite were influenced by this work.

25. Madame de Steiger's *On a Gold Basis: A Treatise on Mysticism* (London: Philip Wellby, 1907) devotes a chapter to alchemy. She and A. E. Waite were honorary vice presidents of the newly founded Alchemical Society.

26. Arthur Edward Waite published two particularly influential collections, *The Hermetic Museum Restored and Enlarged*, 2 vols. (London: J. Elliott & Co., 1893) and *Collectanea Chemica* (London: J. Elliott & Co., 1893), a selection of treatises obtained from a manuscript collection belonging to the occultist Frederick Hockley.

27. The "Z. 2." document was written by MacGregor Mathers and circulated during the 1890s. See [S. L. MacGregor Mathers,] S. R. M. D., "Z. 2. The Formulae of the Magic of Light. An Introduction to the Practical Working of the Z. 2. Formulae," in Israel Regardie, *The Golden Dawn: An Account of the Teachings, Rites and Ceremonies of the Order of the Golden Dawn* (1982 printing), vol. 3, bk. 5, pp. 152–92. R. A. Gilbert, "Secret Writings: The Magical Manuscripts of Frederick Hockley," in *The Rosicrucian Seer: Magical Writings of Frederick Hockley*, ed. John Hamill (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1986), 28, comments on the Second Order Adepts' exposure to Hockley's alchemical manuscripts. It was presumably some of these that Waite published in his *Collectanea Chemica*.

28. See C. L. Zalewski, *Herbs in Magic and Alchemy* (Bridport: Prism Press, 1990), 10–11. Zalewski (101–12) refers to the Golden Dawn's "Z.2." ritual. She was introduced to herbal magic through an Order called the Smaragdum Thallases, a modern offshoot of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in New Zealand. My thanks to Elizabeth Waters for drawing my attention to Zalewski's work.

29. *Ibid.*, 8.

30. Redgrove, *Alchemy*, draws on A. E. Waite's understanding of this science and philosophy (in *The Hermetic Museum* and elsewhere) to similarly argue for a distinction between "chemical" and "mystical" alchemy. Redgrove's book is largely devoted to the chemical aspects of alchemy.

31. This might have been a matter for debate within the Second Order of the Golden Dawn. A Flying Roll written by William Wynn Westcott (and originally given as a lecture in 1890) cautioned against a too spiritual interpretation of alchemy. See [Westcott,] S. A., Flying Roll No. 7, "Alchemy," in *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy . . . Being Hitherto Unpublished Golden Dawn Material*, ed. Francis King (London: Neville Spearman, 1971), 165–77.

32. Eugenius Philalethes, *Euphrates, or the Waters of the East*. (Cornhill: printed for Robert Boulter, 1655; reprint, with a commentary by S. S. D. D. [Florence Farr], London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896), 10. William Wynn Westcott, in his short preface to this reprint, attributes the pamphlet to Thomas Vaughan, "that eminent Rosicrucian Adept."

33. See Florence Farr, "The Rosicrucians and Alchemists," *Occult Review* 7, no. 5 (January–June 1908): 260, 261.

34. See Alan Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4, 466, for mention of the French Masonic link with mesmerism and magic.

35. [Florence Farr,] S. S. D. D., *Egyptian Magic: An Essay on the Nature and Applications of Magical Practices in Pharaonic and Ptolemaic Egypt*, a reprint of the 1896 text with an introduction by Timothy D'Arch Smith (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1982), 11.

36. See R. W. Felkin, *Hypnotism or Psycho-Therapeutics* (Edinburgh: Y. J. Pentland, 1890), a short piece reprinted from the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*; and, as an early example of C. Lloyd Tuckey's many contributions on the subject, his *Psycho-Therapeutics; or, Treatment by Sleep and Suggestion* (London: Baillière, Tindall and Cox, 1889).

37. Annie Besant, *A Study in Consciousness: A Contribution to the Science of Psychology* (1904; 2d ed., London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1915), 215–16.

38. *Ibid.*, 224, 221–22, 225–26, 229, 232. See also Annie Besant, *Theosophy and the New Psychology* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1904).

39. The Golden Dawn followed Eliphas Lévi, the French occultist, in referring to planes other than the physical as the Astral Light. Madame Blavatsky also referred to the Astral Light, but the term should not be confused with the “astral plane” of the Theosophists, which refers simply to one occult dimension close to that of the physical. See Francis King, *Modern Ritual Magic: The Rise of Western Occultism* (Bridport: Prism, 1989), 56.

40. “Ritual U,” *The Secret Wisdom of the Lesser World or Microcosm Which Is Man, Part 5: Of Travelling in the Spirit Vision*, reproduced in R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983), 130. “Ritual U” provided Adepts with the theoretical basis of Astral Travel.

41. Florence Farr, *The Mystery of Time: A Masque* (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1905), preface (pages unnumbered). The short three-person play was presented at the Albert Hall Theatre, London, 17 January 1905. Lewis Casson, who was to become a celebrated actor, played the part of the Present.

42. [Florence Farr,] S. S. D. D., “An Introduction to Alchemy and Notes” in *A Short Enquiry concerning the Hermetic Art* by a Lover of Philalethes, preface by Non Omnis Moriar [William Wynn Westcott] (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1894), 11.

43. William Wynn Westcott, “A Recent Spiritual Development,” *S.R.I.A. Transactions of the Metropolitan College* (1917) 18–25, reproduced in *The Magical Mason: Forgotten Hermetic Writings of William Wynn Westcott, Physician and Magus*, ed. R. A. Gilbert (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983), 294–95. These points are elaborated in chapter 5 of the present text, which details examples of “the magical process.”

44. Westcott, “A Recent Spiritual Development,” 294–95.

45. Letter of 17 January 1901 from Sapientia Sapienti Dono Date [Florence Farr] to Sub Spe [Brodie-Innes], reproduced in George Mills Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1974), 221–23.

46. Annie Horniman's complaint was read at a Second Order meeting held on 22 November 1902; cited in Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order, 1887–1923* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 247.

47. See Dr. Felkin's “The Group as I knew it, and Fortiter [Annie Horniman],” cited in Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order, 1887–1923* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 250–51.

48. See Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 428 n. 26.

49. [W. B. Yeats,] D. E. D. I., “Is the Order of R. R. et A. C. to Remain a Magical Order?”

reproduced in *Yeats's Golden Dawn*, by George Mills Harper (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1974), 262, 261.

50. Farr, *The Mystery of Time*, preface.

51. [Farr,] S. S. D. D. "An Introduction to Alchemy and Notes," 13.

52. See Besant, *A Study in Consciousness*, 208–9; and Annie Besant, *The Reality of the Invisible and the Actuality of the Unseen Worlds*, *The Theosophical Review* 36, no. 216 (August 1905); reprint, Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1921, *passim*.

53. Florence Farr, *The Solemnization of Jacklin: Some Adventures on the Search for Reality* (London: A.C. Fifield, 1912), 157.

54. Annie Besant, *Why I Became a Theosophist* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1891), 17.

55. William Wynn Westcott, "Man, Miracle, Magic. From the Ancient Rosicrucian Dogmata," a paper read to members of the Isis Temple of the Golden Dawn, undated, in *The Magical Mason: Forgotten Hermetic Writings of William Wynn Westcott*, ed. R. A. Gilbert (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983), 66; and Florence Farr, "The Magic of a Symbol," *The Occult Review* 7, no. 2 (February 1908), 86.

56. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. and introduced by Alexander Tille (London: Henry & Co., 1896).

57. See [A. R. Orage,] "The Future of the New Age," *New Age* 1 (2 May 1907): 8.

58. See, for example, Annie Besant, "On the Watch-Tower," *The Theosophical Review* 27 (15 October 1900): 101–2; and "A. J. O.," "Readings and Re-Readings: *Zanoni*," *The Theosophical Review* 31 (15 December 1902): 338–46. David S. Thatcher, *Nietzsche in England, 1890–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 219–20, ascribes the *Zanoni* article to A. R. Orage.

59. A. R. Orage, *Consciousness: Animal, Human, and Superman* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1907), 85. The book originated as three Theosophical lectures.

60. *Ibid.*, 68, 75–78.

61. Isabelle de Steiger, *Superhumanity: A Suggestive Enquiry into the Mystic and Material Meaning of the Christian Word Regeneration* (London: Elliot Stock, 1916), 47 (original emphasis). Note the respectful allusion to Mrs. Atwood's earlier *Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery* (see note 24 above). De Steiger's book is full of references to alchemy as well as the cabalistic teachings of the Golden Dawn.

62. Ralph Shirley, *The New God, and Other Essays* (London: William Rider & Son, 1911), 188–89, cited in David S. Thatcher, *Nietzsche in England, 1890–1914*, 222.

63. See, for her review of A. R. Orage's *Consciousness: Animal, Human, and Superman*, Florence Farr, "Superman Consciousness," *New Age* 1 (6 June 1907): 92.

64. De Steiger, *Superhumanity*, 38.

65. *Ibid.*, 40, 14 (original emphasis).

66. [Moira Mathers,] "Know Thyself," 140, 141.

67. De Steiger, *Superhumanity*, 1.

68. Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, translated from the second edition of the German work (London: W. Heinemann, 1895), devotes book 2 (consisting of six chapters) to mysticism. The sixth chapter briefly considers the French fin-de-siècle occultism of Papus, Stanislas de Guaita, and Joséphin Péladan.

69. This theme is developed by Joy Dixon, "Gender, Politics, and Culture in the New Age: Theosophy in England, 1880–1935," Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1993. For an elaboration

of the fascist theme, see N. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1985).

70. See Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass, eds., *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3.

71. Henri Louis Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. T. E. Hulme (London: Macmillan & Co., 1913); originally published under the title “Introduction à la métaphysique,” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* (January 1903).

72. W. B. Yeats, *Memoirs*, transcribed and edited by Denis Donoghue (London: Macmillan, 1972), 73.

73. For a helpful introduction to vitalism, see George Rousseau, “The Perpetual Crises of Modernism and the Traditions of Enlightenment Vitalism: With a Note on Mikhail Bakhtin,” in *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy*, ed. Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 15–75.

74. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (London: Macmillan & Co., 1911; reprint, London: Macmillan, 1960), 174; page reference is to the reprint edition. The 1911 edition was the first available English translation of *L'Évolution Créatrice*. In his 1903 article, “Introduction to Metaphysics,” Bergson identifies two kinds of knowledge—analysis and intuition. He develops his theme in *Creative Evolution*, where he distinguishes intuition from both “intellect” (or “intelligence”) and “instinct.” Bergson’s definition of intuition is elusive, but he argues that it is conscious, reflective, and capable of grasping “life.” In this sense, intuition outstrips intellect and instinct (to which it is related). For a helpful if partial exposition of Bergson’s ideas published in 1926 by a long-time friend, see J. Chevalier, *Bergson*, trans. L. A. Clare (London: Rider, 1928).

75. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 281–82, 241. For a helpful discussion of these issues, see Jürgen Klein, “Vitalism, Empiricism, and the Quest for Reality in German and English Philosophy,” in *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy*, ed. Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 190–229.

76. Letter to Mrs. Meyrick Heath written in 1913, in Evelyn Underhill, *The Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, ed. Charles Williams (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1943), 146. Like Bergson, Underhill was deeply attracted to Roman Catholicism.

77. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, 10.

78. Orage, *Consciousness*, 82.

79. Edward Maitland, *Anna Kingsford: Her Life, Letters, Diary and Work* (London: George Redway, 1896), 2:178; and Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 209–10, 283–84.

80. William James, “Address by the President,” *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 12 (1896): 9, 8.

81. Letter from Théodore Flournoy to William James, 17 July 1907, reproduced in Robert C. Le Clair, ed., *The Letters of William James and Théodore Flournoy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 190 (original emphasis).

82. William James, “The Compounding of Consciousness” (lecture 5 of *A Pluralistic Universe*) in *The Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 558, 556. *A Pluralistic Universe* (London: Longmans & Co., 1909), is full of glowing references to Bergson and treats his “Critique of Intellectualism” in lecture 6. The book originated as the Hibbert Lectures, delivered by James at Manchester College, Oxford, in 1908. For a contemporary treatment of the differences between the philosophies of James and Bergson, one weighted in favor of James, see Horace M. Kallen, *William James and Henri Bergson: A Study in Contrasting Theories of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1914).

83. James, "The Compounding of Consciousness," 558.

84. This is, of course, a shorthand account of complex ideas that were advanced in the last decade of James's life. His concepts of reality and pure experience were elaborated in *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909) and the posthumously published *Some Problems of Philosophy*, ed. Henry James Jr. (London: Longmans & Co., 1911), and *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, ed. Ralph Barton Perry (London: Longmans & Co., 1912). For a particularly helpful discussion of James's ideas on reality, see Gerald E. Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), chap. 11.

85. J.-K. Huysmans, *A Rebours* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1884) and Joséphin Péladan, *Le Vice Suprême* (Paris: Librairie des auteurs modernes, 1884).

86. See Judith Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 38–50, for an extended relevant treatment of Huysmans's *A Rebours*, and 174–75 for comment on the relationship between Huysmans, Bergson, and Proust.

87. Natan Zach, "Imagism and Vorticism," in *Modernism 1890–1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976; reprint, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), 229; page reference is to reprint edition.

88. This is Frank Kermode's phrase. See Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (New York: Chilmark Press, 1961), 128, and his discussion of T. E. Hulme on pp. 119–37.

89. [Florence Farr,] S. S. D. D., Flying Roll No. 13, "Secrecy and Hermetic Love," in *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy . . . Being Hitherto Unpublished Golden Dawn Material*, ed. Francis King (London: Neville Spearman, 1971), 150. See also Florence Farr's essay "The Magic of a Symbol," and the discussion of ancient Egyptian ritual symbolism in her *Egyptian Magic*.

90. See Ralph Shirley, "Notes of the Month," *Occult Review* 5, no. 4 (April 1907): 238–39.

91. See Arthur William Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: W. Heinemann, 1899). John Senior, *The Way Down and Out: The Occult in Symbolist Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1959), opens up consideration of the relationship between the occult and Symbolism. Kermode, *Romantic Image*, pursues these issues in his chapter on Arthur Symons, 107–18, and was influential in establishing the importance of the Hermetic tradition (and specifically magic) for Romantic, Symbolist, and early twentieth-century post-Symbolist aesthetics.

92. See Thomas William Heyck, "The Genealogy of Irish Modernism: The Case of W. B. Yeats," in *Piety and Power in Ireland*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and David W. Miller (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), for a historically situated account of the development of Yeats's literary Modernism; and Timothy Materer, *Modernist Alchemy: Poetry and the Occult* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), for a full consideration of the impact of occultism on twentieth-century poetry.

93. J. W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848–1914* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 219–33, similarly locates occultism within this European intellectual and cultural context.

94. Pierre Janet, *Baco Verulamius alchemicis philosophis quid debuerit* (Angers: Imprimerie Burdin, 1889). See Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 339, who comments that Janet seemed fascinated by Bacon, who was both a pupil of alchemists and a scientific pioneer.

95. Tuckey's work often went through several editions. See, for example, his substantive *Treatment by Hypnotism and Suggestion; or, Psycho-Therapeutics*, 4th ed. (London: Baillière, Tindall and Cox, 1900). For C. Lloyd Tuckey, see also note 36 above.

96. See Edmund Gurney, Frederic W. H. Myers, and Frank Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living* (London: Trübner and Co., 1886), 2:658–59.

97. For a discussion of Freud and occultism, see Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1957), 3:375–407; and, from a different perspective, James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Company, 1976), chap. 6. Freud referred to the occult as “the black tide of mud” in an exchange with Jung and appeared to be using the term synonymously with psychical research. For his remarks, see C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 173.

98. See Richard Noll, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 69, who notes that Jung’s debt to Mead remains largely unacknowledged.

99. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 231. For Jung’s links with fin-de-siècle occultism, see Noll, *The Jung Cult*, 58–74; and Webb, *Occult Establishment*, 394. Jung’s *Psychology and Alchemy* was originally published under the title *Psychologie und Alchemie* (Zurich: Rascher Verlag, 1944).

100. Farr, *The Solemnization of Jacklin*, preface.

101. De Man, “What Is Modern?” 12.

102. Chapter 8 in the present text considers the ways in which these themes were explored later in the century by members of the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute of Social Research), now commonly referred to as the Frankfurt School. Figures associated with the Institut include Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Walter Benjamin. The Frankfurt School’s Critical Theory addressed idealist philosophy and reviewed fin-de-siècle notions of the self in its own blend of marxist and psychoanalytic theory. Given Theodor Adorno’s trenchant critique of occultism during the 1940s and 1950s, it is poignantly instructive of the ongoing purchase of fin-de-siècle “mysticism” that as the human tragedy of the First World War unfolded, the young Walter Benjamin was immersing himself in Symbolist writing and preparing to move on to mystical philosophy, apocalyptic prophecy, and the Jewish Cabala.

103. Marshall Berman, “Why Modernism Still Matters,” in *Modernity and Identity*, ed. Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1992), 42. For Freud’s reckoning with the horrors of the Great War, see his “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death” (1915), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14 (London: Hogarth Press, 1957); and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (London: Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1930).

104. Hollinger, “The Knower and the Artificer, with Postscript 1993,” 28.

105. Farr, *The Mystery of Time*, preface.

Chapter Five

1. [S. L. MacGregor Mathers,] G. H. Frater D. D. C. F. [Deo Duce Comite Ferro], Flying Roll No. 11, “Clairvoyance,” reproduced in *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy . . . Being Hitherto Unpublished Golden Dawn Material*, ed. Francis King (London: Neville Spearman, 1971), 61–69, outlines the three stages of clairvoyance. It was originally issued 30 March 1893 and, like all Flying Rolls, provided the formal basis for teaching in the Golden Dawn. Golden Dawn documents invariably refer to “Skrying,” and I have retained that spelling where appropriate.

2. The exploration of John Dee’s cosmology by Aleister Crowley, the renegade Golden Dawn magician who established his own magical Order, is detailed in chapter 6 of the present text.

3. See [Moina Mathers, et al.,] Flying Roll No. 33, “Visions of Squares upon the Enochian Tablets,” reproduced in *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy . . . Being Hitherto Unpublished*

Golden Dawn Material, ed. Francis King (London: Neville Spearman, 1971), 81–87. The seven visions described in this document include those of Moira Mathers and Dr. Berridge. Francis King provides an outline of the complex Enochian system in *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy*, 247–49. Israel Regardie, *The Golden Dawn: An Account of the Teachings, Rites and Ceremonies of the Order of the Golden Dawn*, 4th ed. (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 1971), vol. 4, bk. 9, pp. 260–345, reproduces the Golden Dawn’s Enochian material together with a brief introduction.

4. See the manuscript notebooks of Gnothi Seauton (the magical name, meaning “Know Thyself,” of W. E. H. Humphrey; I follow the Warburg catalogue in omitting an s from the end of his second name) held in the Gerald Yorke Collection, The Warburg Institute, “New Listing” 60, 66, 100. These detail a series of scrying episodes that took place in July and August 1901 with the apparent aim of exploring Enochian symbolism. Humphrey was the scribe of the group, which also included J. Knight Gardner. The medium, probably the individual identified only as “I. O.,” appeared to lack the kind of detailed knowledge that would have been available to an Adept. Unlike Dee’s medium, the individual involved was a woman.

5. A paper dated August 1894 outlining the Hindu Tattwa system was issued to all members of the Philosophus grade, the highest grade within the First Order. According to Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, vol. 4, bk. 7, pp. 95–96, it is essentially a précis of a book by Rama Prasad entitled *Nature’s Finer Forces, or the Science of Breath*, which was familiar to the early members of the Theosophical Society. The paper was held in high esteem by early Adepts of the Golden Dawn; they apparently recognized its similarity to the unacknowledged original source. The paper was later withdrawn.

6. [Florence Farr:] S. S. D. D., Flying Roll No. 4, “An Example of Mode of Attaining to Spirit Vision and What Was Seen by Two Adepts—S.S.D.D. [Florence Farr] and F. [Fidelis, Elaine Simpson] on November 10th 1892,” in *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy . . . Being Hitherto Unpublished Golden Dawn Material*, ed. Francis King (London: Neville Spearman, 1971), 57 (original emphasis). See also Mary K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester, Vt.: Park Street Press, 1995), 110–12, for her detailed hypothetical example of “skrying with the ‘Akasha of Tejas’ Tattva” [sic]. The Tattwas were used for both “Skrying” and “Travelling,” but S. L. MacGregor Mathers in Flying Roll No. 11, “Clairvoyance,” cautioned that the forehead method was not always to be recommended. Highly experienced magicians employed a variety of other symbols (tarot cards, for example) in their occult practice, and some could achieve their ends without any material props. I follow Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, and R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983) in my spelling of Tattwa; F. King, ed., *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy*, prefers Tattva.

7. See Aleister Crowley [Oliver Haddo, pseud.], “The Herb Dangerous—(Part 11). The Psychology of Hashish,” *The Equinox* 1, no. 2 (September 1909): 31–89. Oliver Haddo is the name of the central character in Somerset Maugham’s novel *The Magician*, and Crowley maintained that the fictional Haddo was based on himself. See also Crowley’s *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autobiography*, ed. John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969; reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1989), 537, 586. See Gerald Suster, *The Legacy of the Beast: The Life, Work, and Influence of Aleister Crowley* (London: W. H. Allen, 1988), 49, for reference to Crowley’s introduction to drugs through Allan Bennett. Crowley subsequently experimented with mescaline, ether, and cocaine, and ultimately became heavily dependent on heroin.

8. See W. B. Yeats, “Discoveries” (1906), in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan &

Co., Ltd., 1961), 281–83. Maude Gonne mentions her experiments with hashish in Maud Gonne MacBride, *A Servant of the Queen: Reminiscences* (London: Gollancz, 1938), 250–54. For the Theosophical Society's warning, see *Lucifer* 9 (September 1891–February 1892): 159.

9. See “Mescal: A New Artificial Paradise,” *Contemporary Review* (June 1898), cited in R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 178.

10. V. H. Fra. Resurgam [Dr. Berridge], Flying Roll No. 5, “Some Thoughts on the Imagination,” with supplementary remarks by G. H. Fra. N. O. M. [Non Omnis Moriar; William Wynn Westcott], in *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy . . . Being Hitherto Unpublished Golden Dawn Material*, ed. Francis King (London: Neville Spearman, 1971), 33, 37–38.

11. Annie Besant, *A Study in Consciousness: A Contribution to the Science of Psychology* (1904; 2d ed., London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1915), 439.

12. [Victor B. Neuburg.] *The Magical Record of Omnia Vincam a Probationer of A . . . A . . .* (n.p., June 1909). All citations, hereafter referred to as *Magical Record*, are from the photostat copy of Victor Neuburg's original fair copy, inscribed in a book given to him by Crowley specifically for that purpose and dated 30 June 1909, held in the Gerald Yorke Collection, The Warburg Institute, London, D.D.14. Aleister Crowley and Victor Neuburg, and the magic they created, are the subject of chapter 6 in the present text.

13. Crowley, *Confessions*, 224. Crowley's first astral journey took place in the autumn of 1898, and his method (including the banishing ritual, usually referred to as the Banishing Pentagram) was published in full as [Aleister Crowley,] “Liber O” *The Equinox* 1, no. 2 (September 1909). See also Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, vol. 1, bk. 1, pp. 106–9; vol. 3, bk. 4, pp. 9–19.

14. *Magical Record*, 33–34.

15. [Aleister Crowley,] *Magick in Theory and Practice* by The Master Therion (N.p.: published for subscribers only, 1929), 252, 256.

16. *Ibid.*, app. 111, 247 (original emphasis).

17. *Magical Record*, 31.

18. *Ibid.*, 87–88, 55, 75, 69–70, 79, 43–44. Some of this imagery had a personal significance for Neuburg and Crowley.

19. *Ibid.*, 111.

20. [Kate Moffatt,] “Astral Travelling No. 2: The Sword,” transcribed from the account set down by Servio Liberaliter (Moffatt), in R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983), 132–34.

21. *Ibid.*, 134.

22. Percival Lowell, *Mars and Its Canals* (New York: Macmillan, 1906) and Alfred Russel Wallace, *A Critical Examination of Professor Percival Lowell's Book, “Mars and Its Canals,” with an Alternative Explanation* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1907).

23. Théodore Flournoy, *Des Indes à la Planète Mars. Etude sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie* (Paris: Atar, 1900); also published under the title *From India to the Planet Mars: A Study of a Case of Somnambulism with Glossolalia* (New York and London: Harper, 1900). The book in fact appeared at the end of 1899.

24. C. G. Jung, *On the Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomenon*, in C. G. Jung, *Collected Works* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 1:3–88. Originally published under the title *Zur Psychologie und Pathologie sogenannter occulter Phenomäne. Eine Psychiatrische Studie* (Leipzig: Oswald Mutze, 1902).

25. See the review of [Sara Weiss,] *Journeys to the Planet Mars. Transcribed Automatically by Sara Weiss* (Rochester, N.Y.: The Austin Publishing Co., 1905) in *The Occult Review* 7, no. 5 (May 1908): 289–90.

26. This is a manuscript account, written in the form of loose notes, of Astral Travel undertaken by F. E. R. (Annie Horniman) and D. P. L. (F. L. Gardner) between 10 September 1898 and 3 December 1898. It is held in the Gerald Yorke Collection, The Warburg Institute, London University, “New Listing” 11 (a). I refer hereafter to this manuscript as F. E. R./D. P. L., Astral Travel.

27. Edward Maitland, *Anna Kingsford: Her Life, Letters, Diary and Work* (London: George Redway, 1896), 2:162.

28. F. E. R./D. P. L., Astral Travel (Saturn), 10 September 1898.

29. F. E. R./D. P. L., Astral Travel (Jupiter), 1 October 1898. *LXX* refers to the sign of Light, one of the magical credentials used by astral travelers. See Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, vol. 3, bk. 4, xiv–xvi. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 436 n. 29, comments that “Jupiter rules not only the [astrological] sign Aquarius but also Pisces, which is characterized by illusion and deception.”

30. F. E. R./D. P. L., Astral Travel (the Sun), 29 October 1898.

31. F. E. R./D. P. L., Astral Travel, *ibid.* The Tiphareth plane is a reference to the Cabalistic Tree of Life and is associated with the theme of sacrifice. Horniman’s allusion is a further indication that these journeys were conceived in complex and multilayered symbolic terms.

32. “Ritual U,” *The Secret Wisdom of the Lesser World or Microcosm Which Is Man, Part 5: Of Travelling in the Spirit Vision*, in R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983), 131; and Crowley, *Confessions*, 224.

33. Anna Bonus Kingsford, *Dreams and Dream-Stories*, ed. Edward Maitland (London: George Redway, 1888). This collection of Kingsford’s dreams was published posthumously in the year of her death, but she had written the preface in 1886.

34. Edward Maitland, *Clothed with the Sun: Being the Book of the Illuminations of Anna (Bonus) Kingsford* (New York: John W. Lovell Company, 1889), xiii, xv. For Kingsford’s understanding of “astral or magnetic spirits” and realms, see *The Perfect Way; or, The Finding of Christ* (London: Field & Tuer, 1882), 77–87. Ether, or nitrous oxide, was dubbed the drug of “anesthetic revelation” by an American, Benjamin Paul Blood, and its dream-inducing effects were well known by the 1890s. See James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Company, 1976), 437–38.

35. Maitland, *Clothed with the Sun*, xv–xvi.

36. See Kingsford, *The Perfect Way*, 88–95; and Maitland, *Clothed with the Sun*, 55–61.

37. Maitland, *Clothed with the Sun*, 5.

38. Kingsford, *The Perfect Way*, 90.

39. Maitland, *Clothed with the Sun*, xiv.

40. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

41. Kingsford, *The Perfect Way*, 91.

42. Kingsford, *Dreams and Dream-Stories*, preface, 13–14.

43. A. P. Sinnett, *The Occult World* (London: Trübner & Co., 1881), 17; and Besant, *A Study in Consciousness*, 226–27, 222. See also William Wynn Westcott, “Dreams,” reproduced in *The Magical Mason: Forgotten Hermetic Writings of William Wynn Westcott, Physician and Magus*, ed. R. A. Gilbert (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983), 181–91. C. W. Leadbeater, *Dreams: What They Are and How They Are Caused* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1908), constitutes a clear statement of the Theosophical position.

44. See Mabel Collins, “The Reality of Dream-Consciousness,” *The Occult Review* 5, no. 5 (May 1907): 268–71.

45. Florence Farr, “The Rosicrucians and Alchemists,” *Occult Review* 7, no. 5 (January–June 1908): 262.

46. Crowley, *Confessions*, 225, 445. George du Maurier, *Peter Ibbetson* (New York: Harper, 1891), features two lovers who are separated but meet nightly in their dreams to enjoy time-traveling adventures.

47. Crowley, *Confessions*, 445. For a description of the mediumistic double, see Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 225.

48. Letter from Maude Gonine to W. B. Yeats, November 1895, in Anna MacBride White and A. Norman Jeffares, eds., *The Gonine-Yeats Letters 1893–1938: Always Your Friend* (London: Hutchinson, 1992), 53.

49. *Ibid.*; and W. B. Yeats, *Memoirs*, transcribed and edited by Denis Donoghue (London: Macmillan, 1972), 87. Howth held happy childhood memories for Maud Gonine, and she and Yeats had spent a day on the cliffs there in the summer of 1891, shortly after Yeats had proposed to her.

50. W. B. Yeats, “Magic,” in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 35–36. The essay was first published in *The Monthly Review* (September 1901), and was included in his collection of essays *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1903).

51. Yeats, “Magic,” 28.

52. W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, “The Trembling of the Veil” (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1955; reprint, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1961), 183; page reference is to the reprint edition. Note Yeats’s use of psychology terminology.

53. Yeats, “Magic,” 49. This was added in 1924 as a footnote to the 1901 essay.

54. Their visions were recorded by Yeats in two manuscript notebooks held in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin, and titled *Visions*. They are often referred to as his *Visions Notebook*.

55. See White and Jeffares, eds., *The Gonine-Yeats Letters*, 70–71.

56. Letter from Maud Gonine to W. B. Yeats, late December 1898, in *ibid.*, 99.

57. Maude Gonine’s account was sent to Yeats with the above letter, and he placed it in an envelope in his *Visions Notebook*. For the full text and explanatory notes on the ceremonies and figures mentioned, see White and Jeffares, eds., *The Gonine-Yeats Letters*, 99–100.

58. Yeats, “Magic,” 52.

59. T. S. Eliot, “A Foreign Mind,” review of W. B. Yeats, *The Cutting of an Agate*, *Athenaeum*, no. 4653 (1919): 553, cited in Michael H. Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 23.

60. Yeats, “Magic,” 48.

61. Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 356–60, gives a helpful résumé of the early SPR experiments on thought transference. See also Edmund Gurney, *Phantasms of the Living* (London: Trübner and Co., 1886; abridged ed. by Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1918), 8–69 (page references are to the abridged edition); Frederic W. H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans and Co., 1903; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904), 1:524–43, 598–635 (page references are to the 1904 edition); and F. Podmore, *Apparitions and Thought-Transference: An Examination of the Evidence for Telepathy* (London: Walter Scott, 1894), 1–142. Myers, *Human Personality*, 1:24, defines *telepathy* as “the transference of ideas and sensations from one mind to another without the agency of the recognised organs of sense.”

62. F. W. H. Myers, introduction, in Gurney, *Phantasms of the Living*, xxxiii. Gurney and Myers published a precursor to *Phantasms* in the SPR’s *Proceedings* in 1884, but it was Gurney who wrote much of the book. Myers contributed a lengthy introduction and Podmore investigated

the majority of the cases. The original 1886 edition was published in two volumes by the SPR, and Trübner and Co. also published an edition in 1886; the 1918 version used in the present chapter unless otherwise indicated is an abridged edition prepared by Mrs. Henry Sidgwick.

63. Ibid.

64. Gurney, *Phantasms of the Living*, 288. For the discussion of hallucination, see chaps. 10, 11, and 12.

65. Ibid., 351–52.

66. See “Note, by Mr. Myers, on a Suggested Mode of Psychical Interaction,” in Edmund Gurney, *Phantasms of the Living* (London: Rooms of the Society for Psychical Research, 1886), 2:277–316.

67. Edmund Gurney to William James, 16 January 1887. Cited in Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, 171. Myers’s hypothesis is so convoluted that it is easy to mistake his intention. He was in fact extremely anxious to try to avoid a “material view.”

68. Gurney, *Phantasms of the Living*, 454 (original emphasis).

69. Ibid., 461, 464–65.

70. Ibid., 517.

71. Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, 173–74, considers Peirce’s criticisms (which were published in the *Proceedings* of the American SPR, December 1887) and suggests that they did not apply to the data supplied in the subsequent “Census of Hallucinations.” The census, which included recent examples of crisis apparitions, was undertaken by the SPR in 1889; the findings were published in the *Proceedings* in 1894.

72. Myers, introduction, in Gurney, *Phantasms of the Living*, xli and n. 2 (original emphasis). Myers adds that he is using the term *higher* to refer to an apparently advanced evolutionary stage.

73. Myers, *Human Personality*, 1:9, 13, 12, 14 (original emphasis). Myers usually (but not always) used the upper case when referring to the self or aspects of the self.

74. F. W. H. Myers, review of William James, *Principles of Psychology*, *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 7 (1891): 111–33. For his view that “subliminal” is more appropriate than “unconscious” or “subconscious,” see *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 7 (1892): 305; and Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, 279. I am indebted to Gauld’s discussion of Myers’s theory of the subliminal self (ibid., 275–99).

75. Myers, *Human Personality*, 1:14–15 (original emphasis).

76. Ibid., 1:14 (original emphasis).

77. Ibid., 1:16.

78. See *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 9 (1893): 12; and Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, 276.

79. Myers, *Human Personality*, 1:35, 34, 31, 119. Myers (xix) defines *metetherial* as that “which appears to lie after or beyond the ether; the metetherial environment denotes the spiritual or transcendental world in which the soul exists.” At one point Myers uses the term *transcendental self* in place of *soul*: *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 4 (1887): 260; and Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, 301.

80. See Sarah Corbett, “Unconscious Development,” *Lucifer* 12 (March–August 1893): 333–36.

81. G. F. Stout, “Mr F. W. H. Myers on ‘Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death,’” *The Hibbert Journal* 2 (October 1903): 44–64.

82. Westcott, “Dreams,” 186.

83. See Florence Farr, *The Mystery of Time: A Masque* (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1905); and Besant, *A Study in Consciousness*, chap. 12, “The Nature of Memory.”

84. All references to Myers are from Myers, *Human Personality*, 1:31.

85. Stout, “Mr F. W. H. Myers,” 44–64; and Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, 294–

95. Gauld (295) seeks to defend Myers against this charge on the basis that Myers “does not regard the subliminal self as a unified entity like a guardian angel or tutelary genius.”

86. See notes 38 and 16 above.

87. See, for example, *Borderland* 1, no. 4 (April 1894) and 1, no. 6 (October 1894). An interest in dreams remained a consistent factor in the occult periodical literature throughout the early years of the twentieth century.

88. See Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 303–11, for a helpful review of the major work on dreams that appeared during the 1860s and 1870s. He concentrates on Karl Albert Scherner’s *Das leben des traums* (The life of the dream) (Berlin: Verlag von H. Schindler, 1861), Louis Ferdinand Alfred Maury’s *Le sommeil et les rêves* (Sleep and dreams) (Paris: Didier, 1861), and M.-J.-L. Hervey de Saint-Denys’s *Les rêves et les moyens de les diriger* (Dreams and the means to direct them) (Paris, Amyot, 1867).

89. Henri Bergson, *Dreams* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1914), is the first English translation in book form of ideas that Bergson was exploring at the turn of the century; Havelock Ellis, *The World of Dreams* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), is similarly an exposition of ideas that he was working on at the end of the nineteenth century.

90. Freud’s *Die Traumdeutung* was published on 4 November 1899 but was dated 1900.

91. See Sigmund Freud, “Dreams and the Occult,” lecture 30, New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (London: The Hogarth Press, 1933 [in fact published 6 December 1932]), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), 22:31–56.

92. Myers, *Human Personality*, 1:155.

93. *Ibid.*, 1:151.

94. K. E. H. A., “The Dual Consciousness. Subliminal and Supraliminal,” *The Occult Review* 4, no. 10 (October 1906): 192.

95. Myers, *Human Personality*, 1:91. Myers refers to Robert Louis Stevenson, “A Chapter on Dreams,” in *Across the Plains, with Other Memories and Essays* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1892).

96. Frederik van Eeden, *De Nachtbruid* (Amsterdam: W. Versluys, 1909) and *The Bride of Dreams* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1913). See Frederik van Eeden, “A Study of Dreams,” *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 67 (1913): 413–61; and Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 307–8.

97. Myers, *Human Personality*, 1:90.

98. *Ibid.*, 1:238–40 (original emphasis). S. L. MacGregor Mathers cautioned against even “Self hypnotisation, for this occurrence would dispose you to mediumship, and to be the playground of forces you must control, and not permit to control you” (Flying Roll No. 11, “Clairvoyance,” 65). Although occult meditative techniques were clearly akin to self-hypnosis, occultists sought to distance themselves from any association with hypnotism because of its connotations of loss of control.

99. Myers, *Human Personality*, 1:241, 126.

100. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 355, 316.

101. For William James’s remarks, published in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* (May 1901), see Gardner Murphy and Robert O. Ballou, *William James on Psychical Research* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), 221. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 318, notes that Myers apparently coined the term *mythopoetic function* to refer to this “middle region”

(the terms *mythopoetic* and *mythopoeic* may be used interchangeably). Although I have been unable to trace Myers's specific use of *mythopoeic*, the term was much in evidence during this period. For Max Müller's discussion of a "mythopoeic period," see "Comparative Mythology," in *Chips from a German Workshop* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1876), 2:52; and George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 57, 60. For Andrew Lang's derogatory use of "mythopoeic accretions" in connection with Pierre Janet's work, see Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898), 367.

102. See Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As if": A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1925); originally published under the title *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1911).

103. For Freud's comments on the possibility of accessing "man's archaic heritage, of what is psychically innate in him" through the analysis of dreams, see the passage added in 1919 to *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Basic Books, 1955), 548–49. Freud was still referring to this idea in 1932 in his "Dreams and Occultism."

104. Yeats, "Magic," 28.

Chapter Six

1. I refer here to the French poststructuralist notion of subjectivity as elaborated in the work of, among others, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Michel Foucault. In general, poststructuralism posits the living, thinking, feeling, human individual as an effect (a subject) of history and culture rather than its autonomous creator. This idea of the subject as effect has something in common with the more familiar notion that each and every one of us is at some demonstrable level the product of our times. In its poststructuralist incarnation, however, the subject is assumed to have no existence prior or exterior to the complex processes of signification through which it is constituted. In other words, the "I" of personal identity is entirely the product of the signifying practices through which it comes to recognize itself and the world.

2. The Plymouth Brethren believe in the literal truth of the Bible as the word of the Holy Ghost, and in the immanence of Christ's Second Coming. The Crowleys belonged to the Exclusive Brethren, beside whom the Open Brethren, immortalized in Edmund W. Gosse's autobiographical *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments* (London: Heinemann, 1907), looked positively latitudinarian. The strictures of Crowley's home life are recorded in his early chapters of *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autobiography*, ed. John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969; reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1989), hereafter referred to as *Confessions*; page references are to the reprint edition. Crowley wrote or dictated what he called his "autobiography" during the 1920s, and it first appeared in the present edited form in the late 1960s. John Symonds, who met Crowley in later life and was one of his literary executors, tends to take a hostile view of him. Kenneth Grant studied with and admired Crowley.

3. Crowley, *Confessions*, 67.

4. *Ibid.*, 387. Gosse's *Father and Son* similarly recounts his family's fascination with the prophetic Book of Revelation, with its references to "the beast," whose "number is Six hundred three-score and six" (Rev. 13:18).

5. John Symonds, *The King of the Shadow Realm: Aleister Crowley, His Life and Magic* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1989), 505, notes that Kenneth Grant believes that Crowley chose "border-line women" because of their astral capacities. Symonds catalogues the fate of

Crowley's women: alcoholism (his first wife, Rose Kelly, and Dorothy Olsen), an incarcerated case of insanity (his second wife, Marie Teresa Ferrari de Miramar), and a suicide (Hanni Jaeger). Leah Hirsig, central to Crowley's life and magical work in the 1920s, was abandoned. She became a prostitute in Paris before regaining control of her life and returning to the United States in the 1930s.

6. Herbert Charles Pollitt (1871–1942) went by the name of Jerome.

7. Crowley, *Confessions*, 142.

8. E. A. [Edward Alexander] Crowley, *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz* (London: privately printed, 1910). See also the helpful introduction by Martin P. Starr in the 1991 edition (Chicago: The Teitan Press, 1991). See also Sir Richard F. Burton, trans., *The Perfumed Garden of the Cheikh Nefzaoui* (Cosmopoli [London?]: Kama Shashtra Society of London and Benares, 1886).

9. Crowley, *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz*, 37.

10. Crowley, *Confessions*, 146. See Arthur Edward Waite, *The Book of Black Magic and of Pacts* (Edinburgh: privately printed, 1898). Madame de Steiger translated Karl von Eckartshausen's *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary* (London: G. Redway, 1896), and it was published with a preface by J. W. Brodie-Innes. The Theosophical and Golden Dawn connections are clear.

11. Crowley, *Confessions*, 176.

12. Allan Bennett was four years older than Crowley and a prodigious scholar. A severe asthma sufferer, he was locked into a cycle of opium, morphine, and cocaine, and in 1899 was living in penury with another member of the Order. Bennett was well versed in Hindu and Buddhist scriptures and later, with Crowley's help, traveled to Ceylon to study Buddhism. See chapter 1, note 48, and chapter 2, note 80, for further reference to him.

13. Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers had discovered the Abra-Melin manuscript in the Bibliothèque de Arsénal in Paris, and translated and published it as *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage* (London: J. M. Watkins, 1898).

14. Victor Neuburg had begun publishing his poems in the *Agnostic Journal* and the *Free-thinker* in 1903. He published his first book of poetry, *A Green Garland* (London: Young Cambridge Press), in 1908.

15. Jean Overton Fuller, *The Magical Dilemma of Victor Neuburg* (London: W. H. Allen, 1965), while not always accurate about the occult, gives a full and invaluable account of Neuburg's life and work. The author met him in 1935 when he edited "Poets' Corner" for the *Sunday Referee*.

16. Crowley, *Confessions*, 563.

17. Crowley's account tends to conflate incidents that occurred in 1908 and 1909, but Neuburg was still describing himself as a Probationer in late June 1909. It seems likely that shortly thereafter the grade of Neophyte was bestowed upon him. See Gerald Suster, *The Legacy of the Beast: The Life, Work and Influence of Aleister Crowley* (London: W. H. Allen, 1988), 188–96, for a guide to the grades of Crowley's Order, and explanation of the attainments required for each.

18. [Victor B. Neuburg,] *The Magical Record of Omnia Vincam a Probationer of A . . . A . . .* (n.p., June 1909), 60–61. See also chapter 5, note 12 of the present text.

19. Crowley, *Confessions*, 593.

20. *Ibid.*, 611.

21. *Ibid.*, 626. His statement here is typical. Crowley was writing tongue in cheek, but he enjoyed a joke at Neuburg's expense and probably did order the younger man to shave his head. The reference to horns is, as we shall see, significant.

22. John Dee (1527–1608) recorded these experiences in his spiritual diary, published by

MeriC Casaubon in 1659 as *A True and Faithful Relation of what passed for many years between Dr. John Dee . . . and some spirits. . . .* (London: D. Maxwell for T. Garthwait, 1659). Dee's system, often referred to as the Book of Enoch, is in manuscript form: Sloane MSS. 3189, British Library, London. Agrippa's "Ziruph Tables" appear in his *De occulta philosophia*, 111, 24, first published in 1533. See Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 130–56.

23. Crowley, *Confessions*, 616.

24. Ibid. Crowley provides an early description of the Aethyrs (presumably based upon Neuburg's notes and his own memory) in "The Vision and the Voice," *Equinox* 1, no. 5, spec. suppl. (March 1911): 1–176. He asked Israel Regardie (see note 69 of the present chapter) to prepare a full manuscript version in 1929, and the subsequent published edition is based on this manuscript together with Regardie's introduction. See *The Vision and the Voice* (Dallas: Sangreal Foundation, Inc., 1972). *The Vision and the Voice* is precisely that: a fully annotated record of Crowley's visions in the Aethyrs, and of the voices he heard there.

25. Crowley, *Confessions*, 619.

26. Ibid.

27. Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice*, 133.

28. Ibid., 134.

29. Crowley, *Confessions*, 621.

30. Ibid.

31. See Ethel Archer, *The Hieroglyph* (London: Denis Archer, 1932). This loosely autobiographical novel provides compelling portraits of Crowley and Neuburg during the pre-1914 period. Archer's descriptions of Newton reflect the general observations about Neuburg in their emphasis of his infectious "irresponsible" laughter, youthful features, and "faun-like" appearance. Neuburg retained a fey, elfin quality throughout his life.

32. Crowley, *Confessions*, 621. Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice*, 134 n. 9, gives scant details of the "sacrifice." See also Fuller, *The Magical Dilemma of Victor Neuburg*, 154–55.

33. Crowley, *Confessions*, 621.

34. Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice*, 153.

35. Symonds, *The King of the Shadow Realm*, 118, notes that this is the only recorded instance of a magician seating himself within the triangle during an evocation. If Crowley really knew what he was doing, he must also have known that in magical terms he was taking a tremendous risk: he was inviting obsession by the demon. Crowley is cautious about revealing his exact position, perhaps not wanting others to emulate him, but it is clear from *The Vision and the Voice* that he was indeed inside the triangle.

36. Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice*, 161. The phrase "I am I" is reminiscent of God speaking to Moses: "I AM THAT I AM" (Exod. 3:14). The phrase was also, however, used by Madame Blavatsky to connote "the true individuality" (as opposed to the temporal personality) of a human being. Although Crowley did not adhere consistently to a Theosophical understanding of the self, he would certainly have been familiar with Blavatsky's work. See H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy being a clear explanation. . . .* (1889; reprint, Los Angeles: The United Lodge of Theosophists, 1920), 33–34.

37. Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice*, 162.

38. Crowley, *Confessions*, 623.

39. This name had tremendous significance for Crowley. Its symbolism is complex, but the spelling is an adaptation of the Babylon of the Apocalypse as given to him by his "Holy Guardian Angel" in 1904 (an episode referred to later in the present chapter). Crowley later

recognized BABALON as the feminine or androgynous equivalent of Pan. The name was synonymous for him with the Scarlet Woman of the Book of Revelation (17:4, 5), the title subsequently bestowed upon his most important female lovers and magical consorts.

40. Crowley, *Confessions*, 623.

41. *Ibid.*, 624.

42. Israel Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle: An Interpretation of Aleister Crowley* (Las Vegas: Falcon Press, 1989), 409–10.

43. Crowley, *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz*, 117. Crowley had experimented with hashish since 1906, and had discovered that controlled use could “push introspection to the limit.” He wrote and later published “The Herb Dangerous—(Part 2). The Psychology of Hashish,” *The Equinox* 1, no. 2 (September 1909): 31–89, in which he records his views. See also Crowley, *Confessions*, 586.

44. Crowley, *Confessions*, 587.

45. The milestone text in this fast-developing genre is Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), but earlier commentators were not slow to recognize the construction of a particular “Arabia” in the writing of explorers and travelers. See, for example, Abdullah Achmed and T. Compton Pakenham, *Dreamers of Empire* (London: G. G. Harrap & Co., 1930); R. H. Kiernan, *The Unveiling of Arabia* (London: G. G. Harrap & Co., 1937); Thomas J. Assad, *Three Victorian Travellers: Burton, Blount, Doughty* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964); Michael Foss, “Dangerous Guides: English Writers and the Desert,” *New Middle East* 9 (June 1969): 38–42; and Peter Brent, *Far Arabia, Explorers of the Myth* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977).

46. The phrase is taken from Charles M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (Cambridge: University Press, 1888). The eight genii, according to Crowley, were Sun, Space, Wind, Water, Earth, Fire, Wood, Moon. See Aleister Crowley, “The Soul of the Desert,” *The Occult Review* 20, no. 1 (July 1914): 21.

47. Richard Burton (1821–90) was the author of numerous books, and towards the end of his life concentrated increasingly on the translation and publication for private circulation of erotica. His works include *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, 3 vols. (London: Longmans & Co., 1855–56), *Wanderings in West Africa*, 2 vols. (London: Tinsley Bros., 1863), *Unexplored Syria*, with Charles F. Tyrwhitt-Drake, 2 vols. (London: Tinsley Bros., 1872), *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*, trans. with F. F. Arbuthnot (Cosmopoli [London and Benares?]: The Kama Shastra Society of London and Benares, 1883), *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*, 10 vols. (Benares: The Kama Shastra Society, 1885–88), and, as we have seen, a translation of *The Perfumed Garden of the Cheikh Nefzaoui*.

48. Crowley, *Confessions*, 461, and dedication.

49. *Ibid.*, 626.

50. Edward Said’s reading of Burton (*Orientalism*, 196–97) as a man who preferred Eastern life and culture while retaining an abiding commitment to the concept of empire is applicable to Crowley.

51. Richard Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa* (London: Longman & Co., 1856), 38. Cited in Fawn M. Brodie, *The Devil Rides: A Life of Sir Richard Burton* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), 105.

52. Further fueling speculation was Burton’s association with sexually marginal individuals like the young poet Algernon Charles Swinburne and the small group with decidedly transgressive tastes which circulated around Monckton Milnes.

53. See Richard Burton’s “Terminal Essay” in the *Arabian Nights* (1885). The manuscript on

which he was working at the time of his death, *The Scented Garden*, was a new translation (this time from the original Arabic) of *The Perfumed Garden*, and was to include a previously omitted chapter on homosexuality. The themes of homosexuality and castration with which Burton was dealing greatly upset his wife, and she destroyed the manuscript after his death.

54. See Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3–6.

55. Crowley, “The Soul of the Desert,” 18.

56. *Ibid.*, 23.

57. Crowley, *Confessions*, 655.

58. Crowley, “The Soul of the Desert,” 22–23.

59. *Ibid.*, 23.

60. *Ibid.*, 23–24.

61. Crowley, *Confessions*, 627–28; and “The Soul of the Desert,” 23.

62. See Mary Ann Doane, “Film and Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator,” *Screen* 23, nos. 3–4 (September–October 1982): 74–87. Doane draws on Joan Riviere, “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” in *Formations of Pleasure*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 35–44. See, with particular reference to T. E. Lawrence, Kaja Silverman, “White Skin, Brown Masks: The Double Mimesis, or With Lawrence in Arabia,” *Differences*, 1, no. 5 (1989): 3–54. It is interesting to note that, while the relationship of Crowley, Burton, and Lawrence to imposture and disguise is different, all three men had a vested interest in masking their origins and uncertain social position.

63. Crowley, *Confessions*, 204. Crowley, of course, had been initiated into the Second Order in Paris by S. L. MacGregor Mathers, who was at odds with the London leadership.

64. Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 206–8, discusses W. T. Stead’s journalistic approach to the Ripper crimes, and his use of Jekyll and Hyde “as a psychological model of the murderer.”

65. For a discussion of these issues, see, for example, Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977); Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage, 1860–1914* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); and Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885–1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1995). Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, is concerned with the narrative expression of the concept of sexual danger, and engages in a detailed discussion of the contradictory implications of W. T. Stead’s crusade against child prostitution.

66. See Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, xii–xiii.

67. Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Stories*, ed. Jenni Calder (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), 94, 83. Cited in a helpful discussion to which I am indebted: Stephen Heath, “Psychopathia Sexualis: Stevenson’s *Strange Case*,” in *Futures for English*, ed. Colin MacCabe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 96, 97. Heath notes that the initial definite article was absent from the title of the novel in its first edition.

68. Stevenson’s wife made this observation in connection with *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. See Heath, “Psychopathia Sexualis,” 106 n. 8.

69. Joy Dixon, “Sexology and the Occult: Sexuality and Subjectivity in Theosophy’s New

Age,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7, no. 3 (1997): 426, makes the point that members of the Theosophical Society also claimed that Freud merely presented, in modern and materialistic terms, centuries-old occult insights. One of the leading magically trained exponents of the psychoanalytical perspective was Dr. Francis Israel Regardie (1907–85), who studied with Crowley as a young man. Regardie was expert in both Freudian and Jungian approaches, and became a lay analyst. He applied the insights of psychoanalysis to magical practice, but adhered to a belief in the efficacy of magic. Regardie’s book *The Eye in the Triangle* offers a Freudian (oedipal) interpretation of Crowley’s visions in the desert.

70. Crowley’s *Confessions*, written during the early 1920s, are full of references to psychoanalysis but, in typical fashion, Crowley thought that he understood “the Freudian position” better than Freud (72).

71. Crowley, *Confessions*, 590; Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle*, 329; John Symonds and Kenneth Grant, chap. 57 n. 1 in Crowley’s *Confessions*, 929.

72. Crowley, *Confessions*, 515, 510.

73. [Aleister Crowley,] *Magick in Theory and Practice*, by The Master Therion (n.p.: Published for subscribers only, 1929), xvi.

74. Crowley, *Confessions*, 624.

75. *Ibid.*, 921; see also 628, 661. Crowley was now forced to rely on his wits and the support of admirers.

76. Symonds, *The King of the Shadow Realm*, x, states that if he had to write Crowley’s epitaph, it would be “‘Aleister Crowley, 1875–1947. He delivered the psychotic goods.’” Symonds, well versed in the ways of magic and encyclopedic on the subject of Crowley, does not accept Crowley’s estimate of his own magical attainments.

77. See *Ibid.*, 287–88.

78. See O. M. and Master Therion [Aleister Crowley], *Liber AL vel Legis* (London: O[rdo] T[empli] O[rientis], 1938).

79. Aleister Crowley, “The Comment,” *Liber AL vel Legis*, reproduced in full in Crowley, *The Magical Record of the Beast 666: The Diaries of Aleister Crowley 1914–1920*, ed. John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1972), 315. “Do What Thou Wilt,” adapted from Rabelais’s “Fay ce que voudras” (*Gargantua*, chap. 57), subsequently became Crowley’s Law of Thelema and the code by which members of his notorious Abbey of Thelema in Sicily were expected to live.

80. Crowley, *Confessions*, 596–97.

81. See the earlier reference to Dr. Jekyll’s inability to speak of Hyde as “I.” In his *Confessions*, Crowley consistently refers to himself during his childhood years as “he,” stating that it feels as though he is writing about “the behaviour of somebody else” (53). Lengthy discussion of narrative voice is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is worth noting that in the *Confessions* there is slippage between a child and an adult “he.” Equally, much could be made of the fact that Crowley dates his conception of himself as “I” from the moment of his father’s death in 1887.

82. Crowley, *Confessions*, 45.

83. *Ibid.* Crowley had earlier been deeply in love with his wife, Rose, and women were always important in his magical life. There was a succession of magical consorts, chief among them Leah Hirsig, the “Scarlet Woman” at the Abbey of Thelema.

84. Victor B. Neuburg, “The Romance of Olivia Vane,” in *The Triumph of Pan* (London: The Equinox, 1910; reprint, London: Skoob Books Publishing, 1989), 145; page reference is to the reprint edition. The introduction to the 1989 facsimile edition is written by Neuburg’s

granddaughter, Caroline Robertson, who argues that Neuburg's work cannot be read as straightforwardly "homosexual" poetry. Neuburg certainly had sexual relationships with women, and married in 1921. A son was born in 1924, but the marriage was unhappy; by the early 1930s Neuburg and his wife were living separate lives. Robertson is anxious to refute the suggestion by Jean Overton Fuller and others that Neuburg's poems are simply "about" Crowley, basing her claim on the significance of male/female polarity within the occult tradition and the fact that Neuburg is often talking about spiritual (rather than physical) possession by the god Pan. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the poems operate simultaneously at several levels, and that both Crowley and the Crowley-Neuburg relationship, magical and mundane, are ever present. It seems impossible, for example, to misunderstand lines such as "Sweet wizard, in whose footsteps I have trod / Unto the shrine of the obscene god" (144), or to misinterpret the desert imagery (12). *The Triumph of Pan* was widely reviewed, and Katherine Mansfield made it the book of the month in the literary journal *Rhythm*.

85. Victor B. Neuburg, "The Triumph of Pan" in *The Triumph of Pan*, 6.

86. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), 61. Theoretically, at least, hermaphroditism and androgyny would imply a self-referential desiring subject.

87. Crowley, *Confessions*, 603. See also Victor B. Neuburg, "The Lost Shepherd," and references to "Panic" in "The Triumph of Pan," in *The Triumph of Pan*.

88. The god Pan also had cultural importance in the revivalist classical drama and arts of the period, and Neuburg (like Norman Mudd, also a follower of Crowley) had been a member of the Pan Society at Cambridge.

89. Crowley recognized that masochism played an important part in his relationships with women, but sought to deflect it through gestures of misogynistic contempt: "Masochism, too, is normal to man; for the sex-act is the Descent into Hell of the Saviour." Recorded in Crowley's diary, 1919–20; see Crowley, *The Magical Record of the Beast 666*, 257. Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Male Subjectivity," *Camera Obscura* 17 (May 1988): 30–67, notes that masochism, traditionally characterized in psychoanalytic theory as "feminine," is equally a constituent of male and female subjectivity (36).

90. Crowley, *Confessions*, 621.

91. Heather Henderson, *The Victorian Self: Autobiography and Biblical Narrative* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), 126–27, makes the point that Edmund Gosse, brought up in similar circumstances to Crowley, also made use of biblical "typological inversions" to register his rebellion against his father.

92. For celebratory reference, see Neuburg, "The Triumph of Pan," in *The Triumph of Pan*, 19.

93. Fuller, *The Magical Dilemma of Victor Neuburg*, 239, reports a conversation that took place between Neuburg and a friend in the 1920s during which Neuburg was shaken to be told that he was "awfully goat-like." He replied: "I *was* one. A goat was my curse" (original emphasis). Crowley did return for Neuburg in the late 1920s, turning up at his cottage in the Sussex village of Steyning Neuburg managed to elude him.

94. The left-hand Path is so named because in tantric rites involving sexual intercourse the female adherent sits on the left-hand side of the operator. See Francis King, *Modern Ritual Magic: The Rise of Western Occultism* (Bridport, Prism, 1989), 119 n. 3, and 113–26, for Crowley's association with the Ordo Templi Orientis.

95. See Crowley, *The Magical Record of the Beast 666*, which includes his *Rex de Arte Regia*, in which he recorded numerous operations of sex magic; and Crowley, *The Magical Diaries of To*

Mega Therion. The Beast 666 (1923), ed. Stephen Skinner (Logos aionos Thelema, 1923; reprint, St. Helier, Jersey: Neville Spearman, 1979), which has a helpful introduction and lists the symbols used by Crowley in his magical diaries. These include the symbols for sexual fluids; menstrual blood; masturbation; the vagina, anus, and penis; oral sex; and so on.

96. This became Crowley's consistent spelling of magic, as in his *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1929). According to Crowley, "magick" restored the Anglo-Saxon spelling and implies an erotic content. According to Symonds, *The King of the Shadow Realm*, ix, the *k* signifies *kleis*, the Greek word for the female genitalia.

97. The Mark of the Beast is a circle containing the seven-pointed star of Babalon. It symbolizes the conjoining of Babalon and the Beast. See Crowley, *Confessions*, 789.

98. *Ibid.*, 851.

99. See, *John Bull*, 10 March 1923 and 24 March 1923; and "A Human Beast Returns," *John Bull*, 30 August 1924. Cited in Suster, *The Legacy of the Beast*, 84–85.

100. "Occasional Notes," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 September 1888, cited in Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 207.

101. Nina Auerbach, *Private Theatricals: The Lives of the Victorians* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 76–77, identifies a late-Victorian "obsession" with "hybrids"—fairies, wolfmen, vampires, and so on, which becomes "something like the cult of the beast." Interestingly, she notes that the "noble Victorian enterprise of mighty self-making always threatens to produce, not superior mutations, but monsters."

102. I am indebted to Jann Matlock for this insight.

103. See *Daily Express*, 19 May 1967, cited by John Symonds in his introduction to Crowley, *Confessions*, 13.

Chapter Seven

1. Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (1913; reprint, New York: Capricorn Books, 1966), 132.

2. See Dora Marsden's lead article, "I Am," in *The Egoist* 2, no. 1 (1 January 1915). The *New Freewoman*, a biweekly journal, began publication in 1913 under the auspices of Harriet Shaw Weaver and Dora Marsden, but in January 1914 the name was changed (at the urging of Ezra Pound) to *The Egoist* in order to better reflect its "individualist" orientation.

3. Undated letter from W. B. Yeats to Florence Farr, in Clifford Bax, ed., *Florence Farr Bernard Shaw W. B. Yeats Letters* (London: Home and Van Thal Ltd., 1948), 37. Bax notes that the letter's contextual references suggest that it was written in December 1895.

4. For reference to MacGregor Mathers's prophecies of war, see W. B. Yeats, "The Trembling of the Veil," in *Autobiographies* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1955; reprint, London: The Macmillan Press, 1961), 336; page reference is to the reprint edition.

5. Aleister Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autobiography*, ed. John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969; reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1989), 404; page reference is to the reprint edition. Crowley, of course, was preparing his *Confessions* in the 1920s.

6. Isabelle de Steiger, *Superhumanity: A Suggestive Enquiry into the Mystic and Material Meaning of the Christian Word Regeneration* (London: Elliot Stock, 1916), 83. De Steiger was writing *Superhumanity* in 1912, but appended to the 1916 edition a note concerning the forthcoming Armageddon.

7. Yeats, "The Trembling of the Veil," 336. One of the most notable examples of such warnings were the messages received by Stainton Moses, an Anglican minister until 1870 and

one of the most respected spiritualist mediums of his day. The spirit controls of Stainton Moses, known as the Emperor Band, were issuing dire warnings of coming catastrophe before Moses's death in 1892. These were made much of in spiritualist circles, and the Emperor Band subsequently spoke through other mediums.

8. See Oliver Lodge, *Raymond; or, Life and Death* (London: Methuen & Co., 1916).

9. These include *The New Revelation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1918), *The Vital Message* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), and the two-volume *History of Spiritualism* (London: Cassell & Co., 1926). Conan Doyle also famously championed the existence of fairies, whom he saw as related to spirit phenomena, in the early 1920s. For my discussion of that episode, see Alex Owen, "'Borderland Forms': Arthur Conan Doyle, Albion's Daughters, and the Politics of the Cottingley Fairies," *History Workshop Journal* 38 (autumn 1994): 49–85.

10. For a recent discussion of interwar spiritualism, see Jenny Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society between the Wars* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2000). Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 54–77, considers spiritualism and the "lost generation."

11. See A. Conan Doyle, "Early Psychic Experiences," in *Pearson's Magazine*, March 1924, 208–9 (original emphasis). Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order, 1887–1923* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 200, notes that William Wynn Westcott mentioned Conan Doyle's article in a letter of 17 April 1924 to F. L. Gardner: "It was all about the G. D. [sic] but both [i.e., Pullen Burry and Felkin] appear to have spoken in a wild manner." Ithell Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom: MacGregor Mathers and "The Golden Dawn"* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 23, reports having been psychically examined under similar circumstances.

12. See [Miss C. M. Stoddart,] "Inquire Within," *Light-Bearers of Darkness* (London: Boswell Printing & Publishing Co., 1930).

13. See Arthur H. Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant* (London: Hart-Davis, 1963), 225–26.

14. See John Symonds, *The King of the Shadow Realm: Aleister Crowley, His Life and Magic* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1989), 163, for Reuss's expulsion from the Socialist League in 1884 on the grounds that he was a German spy. Chapter 6 heretofore makes brief mention of Crowley's involvement with the Ordo Templi Orientis.

15. See Francis King, *Modern Ritual Magic: The Rise of Western Occultism* (Bridport: Prism, 1989), 125–26.

16. Yeats, "The Trembling of the Veil," 337.

17. See Dion Fortune, "Ceremonial Magic Unveiled," in *The Occult Review* 57, no. 1 (January 1933): 22–23. Violet Firth (Dion Fortune) notes here that *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage* (London: W. Rider, 1924) was written before she had attained the grade in the Alpha and Omega "in which that teaching was given" (22). See also Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom*, 294. For the life and work of Violet Firth, see Charles Fielding and Carr Collins, *The Story of Dion Fortune* (Dallas: Star and Cross Publications, 1985) and Alan Richardson, *Priestess: The Life and Magic of Dion Fortune* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1987).

18. See Israel Regardie, *The Tree of Life: A Study in Magic* (London: Rider & Co., 1932) and the companion volume, *A Garden of Pomegranates: An Outline of the Qabalah* (London: Rider & Co., 1932). For Israel Regardie and his four-volume publication of the Golden Dawn materials, see chapter 2, note 20 in the present text.

19. According to Aleister Crowley, Allan Bennett "learnt a great deal of the theory and practice of Yoga" from Ponnambalam Ramanathan, who was then Solicitor-General of Cey-

lon. Florence Farr had met Ramanathan during his visit to England shortly after the turn of the century. See Crowley, *Confessions*, 237; and Josephine Johnson, *Florence Farr: Bernard Shaw's "New Woman"* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Ltd., 1975), 93.

20. Lucien de Zilwa, acting senior physician, in a letter to Josephine Johnson. See Johnson, *Florence Farr*, 211.

21. Letter of 1924 from William Wynn Westcott to F. L. Gardner, cited in Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 284.

22. *The Adyar Bulletin*, June 1912, cited in Gregory Tillett, *The Elder Brother: A Biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 139.

23. See chapter 3, note 65 in the present text.

24. See Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening* (London: John Murray, 1975), 272. Mary Lutyens was the daughter of Lady Emily Lutyens, who was the granddaughter of Edward Bulwer-Lytton and daughter of a former viceroy of India. Lady Emily Lutyens became a Theosophist in 1910 and was a devoted supporter of Krishnamurti. Mary Lutyens' father, Edwin, was appointed architect of the new capital of British Delhi in 1912 and went on to a distinguished architectural career.

25. The *Times* (London), 21 September 1933. Leadbeater died in February 1934, and his obituary appeared in the *Times* on 2 March 1934. See Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 327; and Tillett, *The Elder Brother*, 253–54.

26. See Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms: A Record of Clairvoyant Investigation* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1901) and Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1914, first English-language edition; reproduced with the original introduction by Michael T. H. Sadler, London: Constable, 1977). For a brief discussion of these issues, see Tillett, *The Elder Brother*, 261–2; and Nadia Choucha, *Surrealism and the Occult* (Oxford: Mandrake, 1991), 28–29.

27. See C. W. Leadbeater, *Man Visible and Invisible: Examples of Different Types of Men Seen by Means of Trained Clairvoyance* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1902). Tillett, *The Elder Brother*, 261, cites the Art of the Invisible exhibition at the Bede Gallery, Springwell Park, Jarrow, 1977.

28. This was Ithell Colquhoun (1906–88), a minor surrealist painter and a novelist. Her book *Sword of Wisdom* is not altogether reliable but is nonetheless a clear indication of her investment in occultism. According to Choucha, *Surrealism and the Occult*, 99, Colquhoun was a member of Kenneth Grant's New Isis Lodge in the 1950s. Kenneth Grant, an admirer of Aleister Crowley, coedited Crowley's *Confessions*. Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), considers the influence of the occult on women surrealist artists.

29. André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 14, 10.

30. Florence Farr, "The Rosicrucians and Alchemists," *Occult Review* 7, no. 5 (January–June 1908): 261.

31. See P. D. Ouspensky, *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947; reprint, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969). This introduction to Gurdjieff's ideas was initially written as a series of lectures in 1934.

32. P. D. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum. The Third Canon of Thought. A Key to the Enigmas of the World*, trans. from the Russian by Nicholas Bessaraboff and Claude Bragdon (Rochester, N.Y.: Manas Press, 1920), is the book that made his name. It was first published in St. Petersburg in 1912. Orage published in the *New Age* a series of Ouspensky's letters written in Russia during

the summer and autumn of 1919, and these have been published as *Letters from Russia 1919* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

33. Katherine Mansfield was already desperately ill with tuberculosis when she arrived at the institute in October 1922, and she died there in January 1923. See James Moore, *Gurdjieff and Mansfield* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

34. Cited in James Webb, *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Work of G. I. Gurdjieff, P. D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), 234–35. I am indebted to this comprehensive and scholarly study for my own brief remarks.

35. Ouspensky, *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution* (reprint, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 38, 3, 16, 19 (original emphasis).

36. See particularly here, Jon Woodson, *To Make a New Race: Gurdjieff, Toomer, and the Harlem Renaissance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999) and Rudolph P. Byrd, *Jean Toomer's Years with Gurdjieff: Portrait of an Artist 1923–1936* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990).

37. See Webb, *The Harmonious Circle*, 536.

38. Cited in *ibid.*, 257.

39. See, for elaboration of this theme, Mark A. Schneider, *Culture and Enchantment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

40. In an interesting if anecdotal twist, Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park situate their influential *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998) in the same trajectory and credit their “shared childhood love of E. Nesbit’s *The Story of the Amulet*, both for our choice of history as a vocation and marvels as an avocation” (11). Edith Bland, who wrote as E. Nesbit, was an early member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. She dedicated her Edwardian tale of magical time travel to E. A. Wallis Budge, Keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities at the British Museum, a man who was rumored to be more than sympathetic to the Golden Dawn. See E. Nesbit, *The Story of the Amulet* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1906). As briefly mentioned earlier, Rosamund Sharp, the daughter of E. Nesbit’s husband (a daughter raised by Nesbit as her own), joined Gurdjieff in France in the 1920s.

41. The self-styled new cultural history operates at the boundaries of social and intellectual history and builds on the concerns of those fields to ask somewhat differently posed and contextualized questions about the ways in which individuals have historically understood themselves and the world. For formative discussions of the parameters of the new cultural history, see Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988) and Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

Chapter Eight

1. Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (1913; reprint, New York: Capricorn Books, 1966), 132.

2. Annie Besant, *Why I Became a Theosophist* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1891), 17.

3. See Michel Foucault, “Georges Canguilhem: Philosopher of Error,” trans. Graham Burchell, *Ideology and Consciousness* 7 (1980) 51–62; “Kant on Enlightenment and Revolution,” trans. Colin Gordon, *Economy and Society* 15, no. 1 (February 1986): 88–96; and “What Is Enlightenment?,” trans. Catherine Porter, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32–50. Foucault is answered by Jürgen Habermas who, while sympathetic to the historicity argument, sees him as implicated in “the philosophical discourse of modernity” with which he has taken issue. See Jürgen Habermas, “Taking Aim at the Heart of

the Present: On Foucault's Lecture on Kant's 'What Is Enlightenment?' " in J. Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, ed. and trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 173–79; and J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), particularly chaps. 9 and 10.

4. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv; originally published under the title *La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979). I follow general practice here in using the term *postmodernism* to refer to a contemporary posture which is closely identified with the leading tenets of poststructuralism. Lyotard's formative discussion of "the postmodern condition" is largely concerned with issues of epistemology, but these equally have clear and acknowledged cultural and socioeconomic implications. As Fredric Jameson notes, "postmodernism as it is generally understood involves a radical break, both with a dominant culture and aesthetic, and with a rather different moment of socioeconomic organization against which its structural novelties and innovations are measured" (*ibid.*, foreword, vii). By "a rather different moment" Jameson means what is variously referred to as twentieth-century "mass culture," "media society," and "consumer society"; also, confusingly, "postmodernity." Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), makes the case for a separation of the terms *postmodernism* and *postmodernity*. He argues for the usefulness of *postmodernism* when referring to "aesthetic reflection upon the nature of modernity" (artistic or literary movements, for example), as opposed to *postmodernity*, which he takes to refer to "the trajectory of social development [that] is taking us away from the institutions of modernity" (pp. 45–46).

5. There is a problem in assuming the stability of "the project of Enlightenment" and Enlightenment thought that my own reference to an Enlightenment concept of reason tends to reproduce. For the purposes of the following discussion, however, I necessarily hold to the familiar idea of an Enlightenment commitment to the authority of reason and science without pursuing the complexities of the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century emphasis on experience and reason.

6. Jürgen Habermas has emerged as the champion of the emancipatory potential of the Enlightenment project, although his interest in recuperating the radical self-critiquing promise of Enlightenment thought predates his engagement with poststructuralism. For collections that explore the ramifications of Habermas's work and his dialogue with poststructuralism and the postmodernists, see Richard J. Bernstein, ed., *Habermas and Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985) and M. Passerin d'Entrèves and S. Benhabib, eds., *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

7. These problems are central to Habermas's engagement with Weber's theory of modernity. See J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987; Boston Beacon Press, 1984), 1:143–271.

8. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–5), trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 181; and Bernstein, ed., *Habermas and Modernity*, 5–6. Recent discussions seek to clarify and systematize Weber's use of the term *rational* and his notion of the processes of rationalization, and suggest that a concern with rationality lies at the heart of his work. For formative examples, see Arnold Eisen, "The Meanings and Confusions of Weberian 'Rationality,'" *British Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 1 (1978): 57–70; Wolfgang Schluchter, "The Paradox of Rationalization," in *Max Weber's Vision of History: Ethics and Methods*, ed. Guenther Roth and Wolfgang Schluchter (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of

California Press, 1979), 11–64; Stephen Kalberg, “Max Weber’s Types of Rationality,” *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 5 (1980): 1145–79; Donald N. Levine, “Rationality and Freedom: Weber and Beyond,” *Sociological Inquiry* 51, no. 1 (1981): 5–25; Rogers Brubaker, *The Limits of Rationality: An Essay on the Social and Moral Thought of Max Weber* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984); Ronald M. Glassman and Vatro Murvar, eds., *Max Weber’s Political Sociology: A Pessimistic Vision of a Rationalized World* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984); and Scott Lash and Sam Whimsler, eds., *Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

9. The Frankfurt School is the name now commonly applied to the Institute of Social Research (Institut für Sozialforschung), established in the 1920s, whose early members include Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Walter Benjamin. The Frankfurt School’s Critical Theory (Kritische Theorie) comprised its own blend of Marxist and psychoanalytic theory. For an account of the Frankfurt School, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923–1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973).

10. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), xiii, xv (original emphasis). Habermas was greatly influenced by Adorno, whose assistant he became in 1956.

11. *Ibid.*, 3.

12. *Ibid.*, 26.

13. See Schluchter, “The Paradox of Rationalization,” 50–51.

14. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 3. For a very different reading of Weber’s concept of disenchantment and its relation to modernity, see Anthony J. Cascardi, *The Subject of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially 16–71.

15. For Lukács’s concept of reification, see Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1971), 83–222; and Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 1:399.

16. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 28, xi.

17. See Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 3–5, 11–12, 173–77. The book is partly based on a series of public lectures given by Horkheimer at Columbia University in 1944. Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 56, draws attention to Horkheimer’s comments on religion.

18. Habermas picks up and revises the Frankfurt School’s engagement with the subject while distancing himself from a Marxist perspective and developing an argument that moves outside what he sees as the conceptual limitations of a “philosophy of consciousness.” See, particularly, Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2.

19. I refer here to two traditions with long roots in the history of Western thought, and indeed that of some non-Western cultures. Broadly speaking, the rationalist position is characterized by the contention that the seemingly nonrational can always be explained within a paradigm of rational analysis (and thus dismissed); nonrationalists conversely hold that there are certain aspects of human existence that defy reductionist rationalist explanation. The non-rationalist tradition as it developed out of the eighteenth century was strongly associated with Germany (particularly Johann Gottfried Herder and Friedrich Schleiermacher) and was closely related to the development of German idealist philosophy. The rationalist tradition, on the other hand, was associated with the rise of positivism in France and utilitarianism in England.

20. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890–1930* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), 33, 15, 37, 15–16. For a recent discussion of

Hughes's approach, and one to which my own remarks are indebted, see Dorothy Ross, "Modernism Reconsidered," in Dorothy Ross, ed., *Modernist Impulses in the Human Sciences 1870–1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 1–25.

21. Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 17, 16.

22. Romanticism swept through Europe and was influential in American culture between about 1775 and 1830. It emphasized interiorized experience and the intuitive and emotional, and constituted an alternative to the more formal propensities of Enlightenment reason.

23. For Horkheimer's discussion, see "Zum Rationalismustreit in der gegenwärtigen Philosophie," *Zf S* 111, no. 1 (1934); and Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 48.

24. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 3.

25. Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 35–36, 34, 35.

26. *Ibid.*, 17, 27, 66.

27. *Ibid.*, 17, 176, 17, 156, 160.

28. Carl Jung, "La Structure de l'inconscient," *Archives de Psychologie* 16 (1916), trans. R. F. C. Hull as "The Structure of the Unconscious" in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Bollingen Series 20) (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953) 7:283; cited in Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 156.

29. Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 35.

30. *Ibid.*, 159–60 (original emphasis).

31. *Ibid.*, 160. For an autobiographical account of Jung's engagement with the occult, see C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffe and trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Fontana Press, 1993).

32. Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, 57.

33. Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 430.

34. *Ibid.*, 28, 29, 27. Hughes cites Georges Sorel as "the obvious example" of a "disloyal" critic of the Enlightenment (29). He might also, however, have seen Carl Jung in this light.

35. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 1, in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, ed. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goodman, and Olga Taxidou (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 591. Bloch's three-volume study of the utopian vision was written in the United States between 1938 and 1947 after he fled Nazi Germany. For a recent critical account of Jung's analytical psychology which takes account of its "Aryan mysticism," see Richard Noll, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). Noll also accuses Jung of fabricating the evidence that led him to postulate the existence of an archaic unconscious.

36. David A. Hollinger, "The Knower and the Artificer, with Postscript 1993," in *Modernist Impulses in the Human Sciences 1870–1930*, ed. Dorothy Ross (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 28; and James T. Kloppenberg, "Democracy and Disenchantment," in *ibid.*, 75. For a broader discussion, see Stephen Kalberg, "The Role of Ideal Interests in Max Weber's Comparative Historical Sociology," in *A Weber-Marx Dialogue*, ed. Robert J. Antonio and Ronald M. Glassman (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1985), 46–67.

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