

A.O.T.O. CONFERENCE, GOTHENBURG, MAY 24, 2026: SCHEDULE

8:30 – 9:00 am, Registration

9:00-9:15 am, **Gordan Djurdjevic** – Opening Remarks

9:15-10_45 am, Session 1: Moderator, Gordan Djurdjevic

1. **Henrik Bogdan** - A Life of Evil: Aleister Crowley in the Swedish Press, 1896–1947
2. **Patrizia Ebner** - A School of Life: Annemarie Aeschbach and a Swiss Pedagogical Reading of Thelema
3. **Stephen J. King** – "He is really a great man on A·A· lines": Alfred Adler and Aleister Crowley

10:45-11:00 am, Break

11:00 am- 12:30 pm, Session 2: Moderator, Richard Kaczynski

1. **William Peters** - Alys' Adventures in Wonderland
2. **Manon Hedenborg White** - The Scarlet Woman and the Mathematician: Charisma and Intimate Relationships in Early Thelema
3. **Christian Giudice** – Breaking the Habit: Crowley's Fountain of Hyacinth and the Continental Reframing of Drug Addiction

12:30-1:30 pm, Lunch Break

1:30-3:00 pm, Session 3: Moderator, Manon Hedenborg-White

1. **Keith Cantù** - Crowley, Quietismo, and Yoga
2. **Gordan Djurdjevic** - Aleister Crowley: Traditionalist! Musings on *Prisci Theologi* and Related Concepts in the Doctrine of Thelema
3. **Patrick Everitt** - From Aiwass to Aiwaz: Aleister Crowley's evolving ideas about the praeterhuman authorship of *Liber AL vel Legis*

3:00-3:15, Break

3:15-4:45 pm, Session 4: Moderator, Henrik Bogdan

1. **Matthew Andrews** - "Bound to the Soul of the Order": C.F. Russell and the Abbey of Thelema
2. **Richard Kaczynski** - From Cefalù to Fleet Street: The British Press Reception of Crowley's Abbey of Thelema
3. **William Breeze**, TBA

4:45:5:00 pm, Break

5:00-5:45 pm, **Keynote Lecture: Marleen Thaler** - The Serpent and the Beast: The Use of Serpent Imagery in Modern Occult Writings

5:45-6:00 pm, **Gordan Djurdjevic**, Closing Remarks

“Bound to the Soul of the Order”: C.F. Russell and the Abbey of Thelema

Matthew Andrews

Nearly synonymous with Aleister Crowley is his Abbey of Thelema in Cefalù, Sicily. The period is fascinating for many reasons, one of which is the close personal contact Crowley had with his students. Among them, Cecil Frederick Russell (1897–1987) stands out for both his talent and later betrayal of Crowley. During his sojourn in the USA, Crowley had cultivated Russell, whom he had regarded as a student of “amazing ability.” After Crowley returned to Europe, Russell followed and spent a year in Cefalù; there, he progressed under Crowley’s personal tutelage, demonstrating zeal in spreading Thelema, while also showing early signs of his eventual break with Crowley. By examining Russell’s unpublished correspondence, this talk offers a perspective on Crowley’s Abbey of Thelema through the eyes of an intelligent student, revealing how Crowley taught and managed his students, and the ideas he impressed on those around him.

Matthew Andrews is a PhD Candidate in Classics at Princeton University. His interests lie in ancient Mediterranean religion, with a particular focus on magic during the Roman and Late Antique periods. For his dissertation, he examines the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri, exploring the role and status of magicians in Roman Egypt and their lived religious experience. He is a research assistant at the Institute for Advanced Study, where he contributes to the project “Transmission of Magical Knowledge,” dedicated to reediting, translating, and publishing the magical papyri. He received his master’s degrees in Classics from both Princeton University and the University of Cambridge, and a bachelor’s in Classics from Concordia University (Montreal). He is the Treasurer of OTO Canada.

A Life of Evil: Aleister Crowley in the Swedish Press, 1896–1947

Henrik Bogdan

This paper explores the presence of Aleister Crowley in the Swedish press between 1896 and 1947. During his lifetime, none of Crowley’s works were translated into Swedish, no first editions appear to have been held in Swedish libraries, and there is no evidence that he attracted followers in Sweden. Despite this apparent lack of reception or influence, Crowley nevertheless appears sporadically in Swedish newspapers and periodicals over a period of more than fifty years. Drawing on material from daily newspapers and popular magazines, the paper examines how Crowley was introduced to Swedish readers almost exclusively through journalistic representations, rather than through his own writings. It argues that the Swedish press constructed Crowley primarily as a figure of evil, moral transgression, and social threat, drawing heavily on international sensationalist narratives while adapting them to local moral and religious concerns. Crowley thus functioned less as an esoteric author or religious innovator than as a symbolic embodiment of anxieties surrounding modernity, sexuality, and religious deviance. By analysing these press portrayals, the paper sheds light on how figures associated with esotericism could acquire cultural significance in Sweden despite the absence of direct textual transmission or organised reception.

Henrik Bogdan, is a Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Gothenburg. His main areas of research are esotericism, New Religious Movements and initiatory societies. He is the author of *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (SUNY Press 2007) and editor/co-editor of *Brother Curwen, Brother Crowley: A Correspondence* (Teitan Press 2010), *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism* (Oxford University Press 2012, with Martin P. Starr), *Occultism in a Global Perspective* (Acumen/Routledge 2013, with Gordan Djurdjevic), *Sexuality and New Religious Movements* (Palgrave

MacMillan 2014, with James R. Lewis), *Handbook of Freemasonry* (Brill 2014, with Jan Snoek), *Kenneth Grant: A Bibliography* (Starfire 2015), *Western Esotericism in Scandinavia* (Brill 2016, with Olav Hammer), *Servants of the Star and the Snake* (Starfire 2018), *The Study of Religion in Sweden* (Bloomsbury 2024, with Göran Larsson), *The Magical Diaries of Leah Hirsig 1923-1925* (Oxford University Press, 2025, with Manon Hedenborg White), and *The Collected Major Works of Frater Achad* (Starfire 2026, forthcoming). Bogdan is the editor of the Oxford Studies in Western Esotericism Book Series, editor of the Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities Book Series, and serves as the Secretary of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE).

William Breeze: TBA

Crowley, Quietismo, and Yoga

Keith E. Cantù

This paper focuses on Crowley's engagement with the seventeenth-century Quietism (*quietismo*) of Miguel Molinos and Madame de Guyon, and the implications of it being framed as similar to yoga in *The Equinox*. Far from being a casual reference, Crowley prescribed Molinos's book *The Spiritual Guide* as reading to students and later made Molinos a saint of Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica. While there is evidence he read Molinos as early as 1898, his interest in Quietism appears to have been alive and well during his walk through Spain in 1908, as it appears to have been one of several inspirations for his notion of "Renunciation" or "Retirement" as well-documented in his "John St. John" magical record that immediately followed this walk. After introducing some of this history and the reasons for which Quietism was—and to some extent still would be—considered heresy from the perspective of Christianity, the paper analyzes how Crowley and his associate J.F.C. Fuller framed Molinos's methods as parallel with yoga as contemplative withdrawal and as the stilling of the turning of thought (*yogaścittavrttinirodhah*). The paper concludes by claiming that Crowley's familiarity with European continental forms of mysticism and mystical "dryness" as expressed by Molinos and Madame de Guyon helped him develop additional language with which to approach yogic teachings and vice-versa, enabling a more nuanced approach to mysticism that intentionally transcended the limits of any single religion.

Dr. Keith Edward Cantù is Research Affiliate and former Lecturer on South Asian Religious Traditions at the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School. His work especially focuses on South Asian yoga, tantra, and the interface between Sanskrit and Indic vernacular languages, especially Bengali and Tamil, and on the connected histories in global esoteric currents. Keith's monograph *Like a Tree Universally Spread: Sri Sabhapati Swami and Śivarājayoga* was published in 2023 by Oxford University Press.

Aleister Crowley: Traditionalist! Musings on *Prisci Theologi* and Related Concepts in the Doctrine of Thelema

Gordan Djurdjevic

To understand Aleister Crowley's written legacy, it is crucial to be comfortable with what often appears to be paradox. One such apparent paradox concerns the fact that a major innovator of Magick and a prophet of a new religious dispensation of Thelema was simultaneously, in his social

and political as well as in his spiritual views, to a significant degree a traditionalist – although emphatically not of a Guénonian variety! Crowley often expressed his deep admiration for the genuine, initiated magical tradition, of which he considered himself a proponent and a mouthpiece. And if and when he deviated from such a tradition, it was, as he put it in *The Book of Thoth*, “in order to carry on that tradition.”

Crowley’s position regarding the initiated tradition of esoteric wisdom is well illustrated in those instances where he lists representatives of a lineage of spiritual teachers culminating with himself as a prophet and magus of the New Æon. Several such lists can be found in his writings: they vary in terms of the number and identities of representatives, with some reasonably predictable overlaps. These lists could be understood as a Thelemic equivalent of the concept of *prisci theologi* (“ancient theologians”), as popularized by the Renaissance Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499). We find such lists in, among other places, the “Manifesto of the O.T.O.” and “The Gnostic Mass,” where we encounter a line of spiritual ancestors as seen from the point of view of Ordo Templi Orientis, and in “The Secret Conference” (co-written with Gérard Aumont) and *The Heart of the Master*, where the emphasis is on the historical antecedents related to the A. . A. . current. Two subcategories among these lineages are the Gnostic Saints of the Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica of the O.T.O. and the historical Magi of the A. . A. ., understood as instigators of new spiritual movements.

My paper explores the above-sketched ideas and speculates on the place of tradition within the doctrine of Thelema as formulated in the writings of Aleister Crowley.

Gordan Djurdjevic is a contributor to the anthology *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism* (Oxford University Press, 2012); co-editor, with Henrik Bogdan, of the collection of essays *Occultism in a Global Perspective* (Acumen, 2013; Routledge, 2015); and the author of *Masters of Magical Powers: The Nath Yogis in the Light of Esoteric Notions* (VDM, 2008); *India and the Occult: The Influence of South Asian Spirituality on Modern Western Occultism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); and, with Shukdev Singh, *Sayings of Gorakhnāth: Selected Translations from the Gorakh Bānī* (Oxford University Press, 2019). He currently serves as the president of Academia Ordo Templi Orientis.

A School of Life: Annemarie Aeschbach and a Swiss Pedagogical Reading of Thelema

Patrizia Ebner

This lecture explores how the Swiss occultist Annemarie Aeschbach (Soror Chochmah, 1926–2000) developed a distinctly continental, pedagogical reading of Aleister Crowley’s Thelema within Hermann Metzger’s Psychosophical Society and the Abbey of Thelema at Stein (Appenzell). Drawing on Aeschbach’s extensive unpublished notes, lectures, and correspondence preserved in the *Collectio Magica et Occulta* (Kantonsbibliothek Appenzell Ausserrhoden), I show how she re-framed “Do what thou wilt” as a comprehensive project of humanistic education and social transformation rather than primarily as a system of ritual magic. Aeschbach systematically linked Crowley’s work to European educational and philosophical traditions, including Plato, Augustine, Rabelais’ Abbey de Thélème, Comenius’ pansophism, Maria Montessori’s child-centred pedagogy, and Jungian psychology. For her, Thelema was to be lived in a communal “school of life” that would cultivate the “inner human” and a new form of social equality, thereby overcoming patriarchal structures characteristic of both church and lodge. At the same time, Aeschbach’s lectures on women, Freemasonry, and sexuality reveal significant tensions and ambivalences: while she argued passionately for the inclusion of women in initiatory orders and for a Thelemic revaluation of femininity, she also reproduced essentialist and traditionalist images of womanhood. By situating Aeschbach’s thought and practice within the broader context of Crowley’s continental reception after 1945, the paper illuminates how Thelema was adapted, domesticated, and contested in a post-war Swiss milieu that sought to build an alternative society in the shadow of both Crowley’s legacy and contemporary media scandals.

Patrizia Ebner is a theatre, film, and media scholar and cultural manager based in Hallein, Austria. She lectures for over 10 years now at Salzburg University of Applied Sciences in the fields of film, media and cultural theory. As full-time project manager in nursing science at Paracelsus Medical University (PMU), she specialises in e-learning content creation and related research. In recent years, she has deepened her engagement with learning and pedagogy, both in higher education and in non-formal, esoteric educational projects. Her research interests focus on esotericism and new religious movements, with particular emphasis on Thelema, gender issues, alternative educational projects and the origins of O.T.O. in Austria through Carl Kellner. She also serves as FSR of Ordo Templi Orientis in Austria.

From Aiwass to Aiwaz: Aleister Crowley's evolving ideas about the praeterhuman authorship of *Liber AL vel Legis*

Patrick Everitt

Several notable studies in the field of western esotericism have analysed and historically contextualized aspects of Crowley's lifelong attempt to develop naturalistic interpretations of religion, mysticism, and magic. These studies tend to agree that while his intention was sincere, nevertheless the religious revelation of Thelema presented an 'unavoidable obstacle' and prevented him from producing a completely naturalistic interpretation of religion and magic. Scholarship depicts Crowley as inconsistent in his adoption of a naturalistic approach throughout his work and often asserts that as he increasingly identified as the prophet of the Aeon of Horus, he also increasingly tended toward a 'preternatural', 'supernatural', or 'enchanted' interpretation of Aiwass, the author of *Liber AL vel Legis*.

However, while this is currently the most prevalent reading of Crowley's thought in western esotericism scholarship, the evidential basis for such a reading is highly questionable. Therefore, this talk will investigate the crucial period of philosophical development which took place in the early 1920s at Cefalù, when Crowley's rituals and writings (e.g. the Cephaloedium Working, the 'New Comment', 'Genesis Libri AL') begin to show a significant shift in his thinking about Aiwass. It will explore the events that led to this shift in Crowley's thought, and analyse the concepts of 'praeterhuman' and 'discarnate intelligence' which he went on to develop. It will show that, contrary to the prevailing view, Crowley was actually remarkably consistent in his naturalistic approach to religion and magic, and in fact never proposed a supernaturalistic interpretation of Aiwass.

Patrick Everitt is an independent researcher of western esotericism and psychedelic philosophy from Ireland. He completed the Masters in Western Esotericism at the Center for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents in the University of Amsterdam, where his thesis investigated Aleister Crowley's pioneering use of peyote for ceremonial magic in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Apart from Thelema and Crowley's philosophies of religion and magic, his primary research interests are entheogenic esotericism and psychedelic philosophy in the works of Timothy Leary, Robert Anton Wilson, and Terence McKenna. He has presented his research on esotericism, psychedelics, and philosophy at a range of international conferences and events, including the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism conference (ESSWE), Academia Ordo Templi Orientis (AOTO), the Interdisciplinary Conference on Psychedelic Research (ICPR), the Occulture Conference, the Finnish Interdisciplinary Conference on Psychedelics (Psykedeeelit), Breaking Convention, the Altered Conference, and the O.Z.O.R.A. Festival. He has been a member of O.T.O. since 2012 and previously served as the Body Master of Peace & Wisdom Oasis in the Valley of Dublin and as the Frater Superior's Representative for Ireland.

Breaking the Habit: Crowley's Fountain of Hyacinth and the Continental Reframing of Drug Addiction

Christian Giudice

The Fountain of Hyacinth (France, February–March 1922) records Aleister Crowley's attempt to break heroin and cocaine dependency through a self-imposed regime of restriction, observation, and progressive abstinence, articulated not as a moral reckoning or aesthetic gesture but as a sustained effort to recover control over behaviour that had become compulsive. Long interpreted through the residual categories of Edwardian excess—either as decadent self-dramatisation or as an extension of occult libertinism—the diary is more accurately read as a document of renunciation shaped by a continental understanding of addiction that had begun to diverge sharply from British cultural models by the early 1920s.

In Britain, dependency continued to be framed largely in terms of vice, weakness of character, or the tragic excesses of artistic temperament, a framework within which intoxication could still retain symbolic value as transgression or expressive necessity. By contrast, continental Europe, and France in particular, had increasingly come to describe addiction as a mechanised physiological and psychological process capable of restructuring cognition, perception, and behaviour, a shift that is reflected with notable consistency throughout *The Fountain of Hyacinth*. Relapse is not moralised, nor is suffering aestheticised; withdrawal is tracked phenomenologically, through insomnia, respiratory distress, fever, obsession, and the emergence of increasingly elaborate rationalisations, none of which are granted revelatory or redemptive significance.

Within this context, the central problem is not excess but agency itself, understood under modern conditions in which dependency converts intention into compulsion. Crowley approaches this problem procedurally rather than expressively, organising his days around imposed limits, regulated intervals, and the gradual extension of abstinence, treating addiction not as a crisis of meaning or inspiration but as a temporal problem in which endurance, rather than experience, becomes the only available measure of progress. Read in this light, *The Fountain of Hyacinth* occupies a serious place within Crowley's corpus as an early confrontation between Thelemic sovereignty and the realities of addiction in the modern world, in which the Law is not relaxed under duress but tested against the limits of agency itself.

Christian Giudice

Dr. Christian Giudice is an academic researcher focused on occultism and esoteric traditions. He earned a BA in Literae Humaniores from Oxford University, an MA in Western Esotericism from the University of Exeter, with a thesis on Aleister Crowley and Kenneth Grant, and a PhD from the University of Gothenburg, with a dissertation on Arturo Reghini. His research has been widely published in prominent academic journals, including *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* and *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*. Among his most recent publications are *Occult Imperium: Arturo Reghini and the Antimodern Reaction in Early XX Century Italy* and *Female Leaders in New Religious Movements*, co-edited with Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen.

From Cefalù to Fleet Street: The British Press Reception of Crowley's Abbey of Thelema

Richard Kaczynski

During its existence over the first half of the 1920s, an experimental society in Cefalù, Italy, operating according to Aleister Crowley's occult system of Thelema—the Abbey of Thelema—repeatedly featured in British press. This reportage was typically more sensational than factual. Crowley's novel *Diary of a Drug Fiend*, a romanticized “true story” promoting the Abbey, met with such backlash that its publisher, Dutton, allowed the book to quietly go out of print...although rumor had it that the book was suppressed. Betty May and Mary Butts sold the tabloids tall tales about cat and goat sacrifices, albeit not supported by their surviving diaries or subsequent memoirs. Headlines about the tragic death of visiting Oxford undergraduate Raoul Loveday, who contracted enteritis from contaminated ground water, gave Crowley the hyperbolic epithet that would dog his name to the present day: the Wickedest Man in the World. Despite feeling too geographically removed and financially unable to return to England and defend his reputation in court, he would press his disciple, Norman Mudd, to take matters to the court of public opinion with *An Open Letter to Lord Beaverbrook* (the millionaire press baron and publisher of the *Daily Express* newspaper). This paper explores the tall tales told by the press, the truth behind them, and how Crowley responded to it all.

Richard Kaczynski is an independent scholar of Western esotericism and the author of *The Weiser Concise Guide to Aleister Crowley* (Weiser, 2009), *Perdurabo: The Life of Aleister Crowley* (New Falcon, 2002; North Atlantic Books, 2010), *Forgotten Templars: The Untold Origins of Ordo Templi Orientis* (independent, 2012), *Friendship in Doubt: Aleister Crowley, J. F. C. Fuller, Victor Neuburg and British Agnosticism* (Oxford University Press, 2024), and *Mind over Magick: The Psychology of Ritual Magick* (Park Street Press, 2025). He was also co-editor with Hymenaeus Beta of the Crowley collection *The Revival of Magick and Other Essays* (New Falcon, 1998) and editor of a critical edition of Crowley's *The Sword of Song* (Kamuret Press, 2021 and Inner Traditions, 2025). His doctorate is in social psychology with a minor in statistics. By day, he has been a professor at Wayne State University from 1993 to 2003, an adjunct professor at University of Detroit Mercy since 1995, and an affiliate of Yale University since 2003. He serves as secretary of Academia Ordo Templi Orientis.

"He is really a great man on A·A· lines": Alfred Adler and Aleister Crowley

Stephen J. King

This paper examines the recorded meetings between Aleister Crowley and Alfred Adler in Berlin in 1930, focusing on Crowley's diary characterisation of Adler as “really a great man on A·A· lines.” Although these remarks have been cited in passing, their conceptual significance has not been fully explored. Rather than attempting to establish doctrinal convergence between Thelema and Individual Psychology, this paper asks a more precise question: what did Crowley believe he recognised in Adler, and how can that recognition be understood through Crowley's Thelemic framework in relation to Adler's Individual Psychology?

Drawing on Adler's teleological account of the striving individual and his conception of the unity of personality within a social whole, the paper proposes that Crowley interpreted Individual Psychology through a microcosm–macrocosm developmental schema operative within his own initiatory teachings. Within Thelema and the A·A· system, individual realisation, cosmic order, and historical unfolding are understood as structurally continuous. I argue that Crowley's remarks on Adler's teleology, scientific method, and the relation of ego and cosmos reflect this interpretive

lens. While definitive claims about intention remain impossible, reconstructing the conceptual logic of Crowley's response reveals how esoteric and psychological discourses could appear mutually intelligible in interwar Europe. In doing so, the paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the intellectual exchanges between esotericism and early depth psychology.

Steve King, MA (UTS), is an independent scholar whose research focuses on Thelema, Magick, and the initiatory systems of Ordo Templi Orientis and the A·A·∴, alongside interests in Egyptology, depth psychology, and comparative mythology. He is the author of Jeanne Foster's *Living in the Sunlight* and is currently preparing a second volume. He is also engaged in a major editorial project preparing a new edition of Aleister Crowley's *Magick Without Tears* for O.T.O. International. A foundation member of Academia O.T.O., he works professionally as an administrator of Ordo Templi Orientis and as a Senior Learning Designer specialising in digital and emerging technologies.

Alys' Adventures in Wonderland

William Peters

Aleister Crowley lived in Berlin for a brief two years at the end of the Weimar Era. Despite homosexuality having been illegal in Germany since 1871 (under Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code), "Babylon on the Spree" was home to thriving and diverse sexual subcultures. Crowley, no stranger to "alternative" sexualities, took the opportunity to explore all that Berlin had to offer, even memorializing the city's unique subcultures in some of the paintings for his exhibition at Galerie Nierendorf. Crowley left for London in 1932, and barely a year later, after seizing the reins of government, the National Socialists laid waste to Berlin's brief experiment in sexual freedom. This paper examines Crowley's activities in Berlin's queer underworld and what became of the individuals and institutions with whom he spent his "Lila Nächte."

William Peters is a member of the OTO and an independent researcher with an unwholesome fascination with early 20th century German esotericism and the roots of Thelema in Germany.

KEYNOTE LECTURE

The Serpent and the Beast: The Use of Serpent Imagery in Modern Occult Writings

Marlen Thaler

Serpent myths have emerged and endured globally throughout history, reflecting the multifaceted, nuanced, and ambiguous symbolic meanings given to this fascinating animal. The shedding of its old skin epitomises transformation, a quality that reflects the serpent's dual roles in myth: healer and facilitator of knowledge on the one hand and harbinger of death and embodiment of sin on the other. From the late nineteenth century onwards, one serpent attracted increasing attention and garnered global fame: the South Asian serpent kuṇḍalinī. Concepts of kuṇḍalinī trace back to medieval tantric and haṭhayogic texts, where it is described equally as a goddess and a component of subtle-body models. It encompasses transformation, renewal, and humanity's share of divine knowledge. In this presentation, I will trace the use of kundalini and other serpentine figures in the writings of 19th- and 20th-century occultists. As I will demonstrate, serpent imagery captivated modern occultists, who not only aspired to know and experience the "serpent power" but also to implement it within their magical worldviews. In this way, kundalini became a mediator of transformation and occult knowledge.

Dr. Marleen Thaler is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Graz, where she is examining the reception of Japan in American counterculture. She studied Religious Studies (Ph.D. 2024), Oriental Studies, and Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Her current projects include an edited volume on Subtle Energies (Brill, 2025), a monograph on John Michell (Equinox, 2026), and an edited volume on religion and transformation (Brill, 2026). Her research interests include the transformation of religion, alternative religious currents, the modern history of yoga, religion and technology, eco-spirituality, and religious traditionalism.

The Scarlet Woman and the Mathematician: Charisma and Intimate Relationships in Early Thelema

Manon Hedenborg White

This paper will consider the shifting relationship between Aleister Crowley and his disciples Leah Hirsig and Norman Mudd from the perspective of religious authority. A Swiss-American schoolteacher, Hirsig became Crowley's lover and student during the spring of 1919, and was appointed his Scarlet Woman in 1920. As deputy head of Crowley's Abbey of Thelema, Hirsig played a key role in stewarding the early Thelemic movement as well as undergoing magical transitions of her own. While sojourning in Tunis, she developed a close bond with her ardent admirer Mudd, a Cambridge-educated mathematician who was also a member of Crowley's inner circle, and his frequent discussant on points of Thelemic teaching. After being replaced as Scarlet Woman in 1924, Hirsig remained devoted to the Thelemic cause for several years, while developing her own interpretations of Thelemic teaching with Mudd as her interlocutor and magical partner. Mudd and Hirsig played a key role in defending Crowley's position at the 1925 gathering of occult leaders in Weida, Germany, but grew increasingly sceptical of his prophet status in the ensuing years. The paper will analyze Hirsig's and Mudd's changing roles in the early Thelemic movement, paying particular attention to their mounting critiques of Crowley's "charismatic authority" (Weber 1947) and how intimate relationships may shape the development of charismatic movements (Hedenborg White 2021; Cantú 2024).

Manon Hedenborg White is Associate Professor of History of Religions at Malmö University. Her current research, funded by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, explores women's leadership in new religious movements. Her notable publications include *The Eloquent Blood: The Goddess Babalon and the Construction of Femininities in Western Esotericism* (Oxford University Press 2020) and *The Magical Diaries of Leah Hirsig, 1923–1925: Aleister Crowley, Magick, and the New Occult Woman* (with Henrik Bogdan, Oxford University Press 2025). She is a member of the editorial boards of the *Aries Book Series* (Brill); *Oxford Studies in Western Esotericism*; and *Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Religious Movements*. She serves as President of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE).