



PALGRAVE STUDIES IN NEW RELIGIONS
AND ALTERNATIVE SPIRITUALITIES



The Occult Nineteenth Century

Roots, Developments,
and Impact on the Modern World

Edited by
Lukas Pokorny
Franz Winter

palgrave
macmillan

Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative
Spiritualities

Series Editors
James R. Lewis
School of Philosophy
Wuhan University
Wuhan, China

Henrik Bogdan
University of Gothenburg
Gothenburg, Sweden

Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities is an interdisciplinary monograph and edited collection series sponsored by the International Society for the Study of New Religions. The series is devoted to research on New Religious Movements. In addition to the usual groups studied under the New Religions label, the series publishes books on such phenomena as the New Age, communal & utopian groups, Spiritualism, New Thought, Holistic Medicine, Western esotericism, Contemporary Paganism, astrology, UFO groups, and new movements within traditional religions. The Society considers submissions from researchers in any discipline.

More information about this series at
<http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14608>

Lukas Pokorny • Franz Winter
Editors

The Occult Nineteenth Century

Roots, Developments, and Impact
on the Modern World

palgrave
macmillan

Editors

Lukas Pokorny
Department of Religious Studies
University of Vienna
Vienna, Austria

Franz Winter
Department of Religious Studies
University of Graz
Graz, Austria

Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities
ISBN 978-3-030-55317-3 ISBN 978-3-030-55318-0 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55318-0>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2021

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: The cataleptic state, 19th century. Credit: Wellcome Collection. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

For Karl Baier

CONTENTS

1	Introductory Remarks	1
	Lukas Pokorny and Franz Winter	
Part I	Mesmerism	13
2	Carl August von Eschenmayer and the Somnambulic Soul	15
	Wouter J. Hanegraaff	
3	Priest-Doctors and Magnetisers: Mesmerism, Romantic Medicine, and Catholic Thought in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century	37
	Maren Sziede	
4	Animal Magnetism and Its Psychological Implications in Hungary	59
	Júlia Gyimesi	
5	From <i>Fluidum</i> to <i>Prāṇa</i>: Reading Mesmerism Through Orientalist Lenses	85
	Dominic S. Zoehrer	

Part II	Occultism in America and Europe	111
6	Total Recall: The “Panoramic Life Review” Near Death as Proof of the Soul’s Timeless Self-Presence in Western Esotericism of the Nineteenth Century	113
	Jens Schlieter	
7	Stages in the Development of an Occult Linguistics	139
	Olav Hammer	
8	The Art of Esoteric Posthumousness	159
	Marco Pasi	
9	Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie and Sexual Regeneration	177
	John Patrick Deveney	
10	The Theosophical Maitreya: On Benjamin Creme’s Millenarianism	195
	Lukas Pokorny	
11	Martial Arts Spirituality in Sweden: The Occult Connection	221
	Per Faxneld	
Part III	Occultism in Global Perspective	245
12	A Study into a Transreligious Quest for the Ultimate Truth: Indian, Muslim, and European Interpretations of the Upanishads	247
	Franz Winter	
13	Occult’s First Foot Soldier in Bengal: Peary Chand Mitra and the Early Theosophical Movement	269
	Mriganka Mukhopadhyay	

14	Re-Imagining an Ancient Greek Philosopher: The Pythagorean Musings of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (Osho)	287
	Almut-Barbara Renger	
15	African and Amerindian Spirits: A Note on the Influence of Nineteenth-Century Spiritism and Spiritualism on Afro- and African-American Religions	319
	Hans Gerald Hödl	
	Part IV Occultism and Modern Yoga	345
16	Sri Sabhapati Swami: The Forgotten Yogi of Western Esotericism	347
	Keith Edward Cantú	
17	Tracing Vivekananda's <i>Prāṇa</i> and <i>Ākāśa</i>: The <i>Yogavāsīṣṭha</i> and Rama Prasad's Occult Science of Breath	373
	Magdalena Kraler	
18	Guru and Messiah: On the First Yoga Handbook in Polish Language: Wincenty Lutosławski's <i>The Development of the Power of Will by Means of Psychophysical Exercises</i> (1909)	399
	Marlis Lami	
	Index	425

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Keith Edward Cantú Ph.D. candidate in Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

John Patrick Deveney Independent Scholar, Memphis, Tennessee, USA

Per Faxneld Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies, Södertörn University, Sweden

Júlia Gyimesi Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary

Olav Hammer Professor of the Study of Religions, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark

Wouter J. Hanegraaff Professor of History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Hans Gerald Hödl Associate Professor of Religious Studies, University of Vienna, Austria

Magdalena Kraler Ph.D. candidate in Religious Studies, University of Vienna, Austria

Marlis Lami Adjunct Professor of Religious Studies, Jagiellonian University, Poland

Mriganka Mukhopadhyay Ph.D. candidate in History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Marco Pasi Associate Professor of History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Lukas Pokorny Department of Religious Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

Almut-Barbara Renger Professor of Ancient Religion and Culture and their Reception History, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Jens Schlieter Associate Professor for the Systematic Study of Religions, University of Bern, Switzerland

Maren Sziede Ph.D. candidate in Religious Studies, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Franz Winter Department of Religious Studies, University of Graz, Graz, Austria

Dominic S. Zoehrer Ph.D. candidate in Religious Studies, University of Vienna, Austria



CHAPTER 1

Introductory Remarks

Lukas Pokorny and Franz Winter

Contrary to past practices, scholars no longer see the nineteenth-century “occult” as a marginal phenomenon. In recent years, many studies have demonstrated that it had important repercussions, be they cultural, historical, political, religious, or aesthetic. This volume contributes to this growing recognition by bringing together 17 contributions dealing with a variety of topics and with American, European, Indian, and East Asian “occult” currents and their intersections with diverse facets of nineteenth-century culture, religion, and politics. Among other things, the volume treats *Naturphilosophie*, Romanticism, spiritualism, mesmerism, Theosophy, and occultism, alongside elements of Hindu, Buddhist, and Afro- and African-American thought. In particular, many of the contributions introduce hitherto barely known figures whose importance is highlighted and it includes case studies from a mix of countries that are often not well represented in the existing literature (Hungary, Poland, and Sweden).

L. Pokorny (✉)

Department of Religious Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria
e-mail: lukas.pokorny@univie.ac.at

F. Winter

Department of Religious Studies, University of Graz, Graz, Austria
e-mail: franz.winter@uni-graz.at

© The Author(s) 2021

L. Pokorny, F. Winter (eds.), *The Occult Nineteenth Century*,
Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55318-0_1

Consequently, the importance of this volume lies in the individual contributions that stand on their own. Yet, there is also an important general framework, which is the basis for the book's structure. This will be elucidated below alongside a succinct presentation of the contributions. The point of departure and one of the most significant aspects of this volume is the importance of *mesmerism* as a highly influential but overall frequently neglected tradition, especially with a view to the formation of modern occultism (but even beyond that, thereby clearly following the scholarship of Karl Baier; see, e.g., Baier 2009, 2015, 2020). Initially developed by the Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) in the eighteenth century, this very special system of “healing” influenced occultism and continued to be popular throughout the nineteenth century across the world, eventually contributing, among others, to the evolution of hypnotism (Baier 2019; Gripentrop 2015; Méheust 2006: 78–79). The impact of mesmerism should not be underestimated, for even key notions of the later occult tradition were coined, developed, or at least expanded within this particular strand for the first time (e.g., the notion of *fluidum*; see Baier 2016).

In addition to the close entanglement of mesmerism with occult concepts, contributions on the occult tradition itself are at the centre of this collection comprising two sections. These sections strikingly show how influential occult concepts were in the nineteenth century and also examine their interpretation in the subsequent centuries. Therefore, a key theme of this volume is the reverberations viz. the impact of the nineteenth-century occult in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and its influence on the culture of modernity. As major traits of the history and importance of occultism have been already examined on various levels, including the influence of occultism on literature, the arts, and politics (for specific examples and an overview, see, e.g., Bauduin and Johnsson 2018; Bauduin et al. 2018; Partridge 2015; Hanegraaff 2013: 146–156; Pasi 2013; Owen 2004), these contributions might serve as additional material enhancing our knowledge of particular areas and introducing new figures within this important strand.

The volume concludes with a section on modern yoga introducing important nineteenth-century exponents and their engagement with the occult. To a certain extent, this last section links directly to the first (i.e., on mesmerism) as the examples show the particular importance of patterns and tropes that emerged within the mesmerism-occultism cluster. What is commonly known as “yoga” today has become almost a

ubiquitous phenomenon, generally assumed to be an ancient Indian spiritual-physical practice. Although it has been documented by important recent studies (e.g., Baier 2013a, 2013b, 2016, 2018; Bogdan and Djurdjevic 2015; Djurdjevic 2014; de Michelis 2004), the close links between the mesmeric-occult traditions and modern yoga are not widely recognised.

Hence, the guiding theme of the volume is the triad of mesmerism, occultism, and yoga. It might be interpreted as a dense and closely interwoven system of patterns, references, and even practices that should not solely be studied on their own. Their globalised dimension will become more than evident in the subsequent description of the individual contributions. Indeed, this might be viewed as one major outcome of this collection as well as one of its key themes: taken together, the contributions show that it is impossible to talk of a “Western” occultism that is entirely distinct from “Eastern” or other forms. Hence, the close interrelation between the various strands and developments will also become rather apparent by the volume’s strong emphasis on examples from not only South Asia but also Latin America and East Asia. Accordingly, the four sections of the volume contribute to a more detailed understanding of the historical development and interweaving of these currents in modern times and in diverse international contexts. In addition to the value for a better historical understanding of the close entanglement of “East” and “West,” the contributions are also related to a rather recent trend in the study of occult and esoteric traditions: namely questioning the overall focus on the “Western” and seeking a new approach towards the relevant terms in a comparative perspective (e.g. Baier 2021; Aspren 2014 for general methodological considerations; Granholm 2014; also see the remarks in Hanegraaff 2015 on the recent discussion; Roukema and Kilner-Johnson 2018).

The contributions brought together in this volume are chiefly works of history, although some interdisciplinarity is easily discernible. There are contributions to the history of science and medicine, cultural history, South Asian studies, sociology, religious studies, theology, and philosophy. Regarding the order of the contributions in the four sections of the volume, we tried to follow, as far as this was possible, a chronological structure. In some cases, this is easier than in others as some of the contributions are dealing with individual protagonists, whereas others try to find larger trajectories within a much wider temporal frame.

The volume begins with the contributions on mesmerism in *Part One*. Notwithstanding its indubitable importance, this is a vastly understudied

area that requires a lot of scholarship that will have to deal with the various actors and their approaches. The contributions in this section can be interpreted as a starting point for precisely such an endeavour.

In the first contribution, *Wouter J. Hanegraaff* portrays Carl August von Eschenmayer (1768–1852), the important Souabian *Naturphilosoph*, pioneer of Romantic psychology, and advocate of magnetic somnambulism. The contribution, which is the first academic study on von Eschenmayer in English, gives a general overview of his life and oeuvre. In addition, a special focus is put upon von Eschenmayer's psychological theory, which he built on German idealist foundations and around the role of animal magnetism—and particularly somnambulant trance. The high importance of mesmeric tropes is evident throughout this contribution.

In the following contribution, *Maren Sziede* draws on two significant but lesser-known German figures whose works espouse mesmerist ideas: Karl Joseph Hieronymus Windischmann (1775–1839) and Johann Nepomuk Ringseis (1785–1880). Both perceived themselves as Roman Catholic authors who tried to devise an all-encompassing, conservative Catholic anthropology, thereby placing their efforts within the broader scope of the nineteenth-century *Naturphilosophical* and Romantic approaches. Their ideas did not only encompass mesmerism; they also aimed at providing a religious foundation of medicine in an environment where medical theories competed and were superseded in the course of a few decades. The result was a fascinating mix of concepts that sought to offer theoretical grounds for what they perceived as the ideal physician, described in terms of a priest—the “priest-doctor.”

Júlia Gyimesi continues with a portrait of the Hungarian magnetiser János Gárdos (1813–1893), who was greatly influential in his days. Gárdos identified magnetic phenomena as the result of the hitherto unknown capacities of the human psyche and promoted a systematic research in the field. However, his contemporary representatives of early hypnosis research rejected his theory and identified it as part of a magico-mystical, “superstitious” worldview. Gyimesi's contribution outlines Gárdos' life and work, illuminating his significance within and beyond the context of animal magnetism. It is a fine example of the vital presence and significance of mesmerist concepts in Central Europe.

In the concluding contribution of this section, *Dominic S. Zoehrer* addresses the close interrelation between specific mesmerist-derived European currents and the growing importance of Asian concepts at the

end of the nineteenth century, with the Theosophical current as the crucial mediator. He traces how the originally mesmerist idea of the so-called *fluidum* qua main transmitter of power between bodies became related to the Indian concept of *prāṇa*. Seminal interpreters include early Theosophical thinkers such as Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), William Walker Atkinson (a.k.a. Ramacharaka; 1862–1932), and Annie Besant (1847–1933). Additionally, Zoehrer draws on the subsequent developments by referring to important figures of the twentieth century, such as the Chinese-Filipino spiritual entrepreneur Choa Kok Sui (Samson Lim Choachuy; 1952–2007) and his internationally successful Pranic Healing programme, which was clearly inspired by concepts purported by the aforementioned writers and deeply rooted in nineteenth-century occultism. Zoehrer’s study is a bridge to both the subsequent and the concluding sections of the volume, where many contributions follow the same pattern, namely searching for major trajectories within a larger temporal frame.

Selected specimens of occultism and the significance of occult currents and concepts in America and Europe make up *Part Two* of the volume, whereas *Part Three* addresses occultism in a larger global context.

The fascinating subject of the “near death experience” is the focus of the contribution by *Jens Schlieter*. An important aspect of the popular classic “near death experience” narrative was developed largely among various esoteric thinkers in the nineteenth century, namely the “panoramic life review”: that is, to recall or re-experience scenes, acts, and thoughts of one’s life in a highly condensed and accelerated form. For various discourses of the nineteenth century—including those of spiritualists, occultists, mesmerists, and transcendentalists—this aspect became extremely important. Purportedly it was a kind of key evidence of the soul’s ability to enter into a state of timeless self-presence and full awareness of everything following its separation from the body, including the current life and former ones. In this contribution, the development of this specific trope is placed within a larger framework of other crucial concepts, such as drug experience, “magnetic sleep,” new technologies of panoramic images and photography, and practices of autobiographical writing.

Olav Hammer follows with a perceptive contribution on a development referred to as “occult linguistics” that became important particularly within the Theosophical Society, starting already with Blavatsky herself. Hammer shows the close relation of these early endeavours with important developments in the academia of that time, which eventually led to the birth of the discipline of linguistics. The so-called “young

grammarians” devised basic rules for a comparative approach towards languages that were closely entangled with theories on the origin and the history of humankind. Although drawing on these early endeavours, Theosophical thinkers rejected major results and developed their own approach vis-à-vis this issue.

In a very innovative way, *Marco Pasi* is dealing with a far-ranging topic, that is not only relevant for the study of esotericism but also for literature and art history, namely “posthumousness” viz. “esoteric posthumousness.” This specific concept, defined as “the inability or unwillingness to have one’s work promoted and recognised during one’s life, which projects the work into a temporal limbo that may last decades or even forever,” is applied to the work of three women artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who were deeply inspired by esoteric ideas and practices. From various perspectives, the paintings of Georgiana Houghton (1814–1884), Hilma af Klint (1862–1944), and Emma Kunz (1892–1963) are characterised by an approach to “posthumousness” and its various ramifications within the history of esotericism.

Next, *John Patrick Deveney* draws on a delicate topic, which was nevertheless at the centre of attention for many occult writers in the nineteenth century: sexual energy as a vital force that helps humankind to unfold its hidden potential and transform the individual that might even survive death with the various techniques taught therein. The major figure portrayed is Kenneth Sylvan Launfal Guthrie (1871–1940), a classicist and known for his translation of the writings of Plotinus. Guthrie, however, was also a prolific occult thinker and writer who developed his own theory of “regeneration” through various sexual techniques that should bring humanity to the primordial state of Adam before the Fall.

Lukas Pokorny adds another crucial figure to this array of occult and esoteric writers who is highly understudied so far: the Scottish esotericist Benjamin Creme (1922–2016) who made a reputation as the most sedulous proclaimer of Maitreya’s imminent messianic coming. Creme averred to be the heir of Blavatsky and, in her succession, Helena Roerich (1879–1955) and Alice Ann Bailey (1880–1949), heralding the soon-to-unfold Age of the Group. Following a brief introduction to Creme’s bio-/hagiography, Pokorny traces the Maitreya(-cum-World Teacher) narrative from its Buddhist inception across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Theosophical appropriations, culminating in Creme’s most vocal millenarian account. His millenarian programme is eventually assessed through a theoretical lens, adding important insights to the wider field of Millennial Studies.

In the concluding contribution, which also nicely leads to the following section, *Per Faxneld* provides intriguing insights into the close relationship between (mainly) East Asian martial arts and important occult currents in Sweden, both in regard to their history of Western reception and also their origin. He points out that some of the popular styles, such as Aikidō and Kyūdō, are heavily influenced by Western esoteric concepts, which made it easy to present them to the interested Western public after their invention in Asia. The “martial modernity” was closely linked to the notion of a “mystic east” as demonstrated by Faxneld who mainly examines the situation in twentieth-century Sweden.

Part Three places occultism in a wider international spectrum with a focus on the Indian as well as the Afro- and African-American contexts. It is thus in direct continuation with contributions of the preceding section and shows the various transformations taking place in new locations. So far scholarship in this particular field has mainly dealt with South Asia, but there are a couple of examples outside this cultural horizon.

The first contribution by *Franz Winter* is primarily concerned with the history of the first interpretation of the Indian Upanishads as proposed by the influential *Oupnek'hat* (published 1801–1802). It was composed by the French philologist and historian of religion Abraham H. Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805) in regard to his predecessors to place its main patterns and interpretative frames in a transreligious context by expanding the models applied for the elaboration on “Western” esoteric concepts. As is shown by Winter, both Indian Advaita Vedānta traditions and the first Muslim interpretation of the Upanishads by the Mughal prince Dārā Shukūh (1615–1659) used parallel interpretative trajectories that became important for the nineteenth-century European reception. Consequently, the question whether the notion of “esotericism” has a transcultural and transreligious validity is addressed.

With the Upanishads and their first translation in the European context, we are already concerned with South Asia, an area of interest in the following contribution by *Mriganka Mukhopadhyay*, who introduces Peary Chand Mitra (1814–1833), considered to be one of the most eminent intellectuals of nineteenth-century Bengal. Mitra was celebrated for his social activism and his writings, both deeply influenced by several religious transformation processes throughout his life. Born and raised in an upper-caste Hindu Bengali family of Calcutta, he was an atheist in his early youth. He later joined the Brahma Samaj and became interested in spiritualist circles after his wife’s death in 1860. In 1877, he received the

diploma of the Theosophical Society making him the third Indian and the first Bengali to become a Theosophist. Mukhopadhyay sheds light on the close spiritualist and occult network that enabled this specific transformation process in nineteenth-century Calcutta, providing an example of the transcultural dimension of occultism at the time.

India remains vital in the next contribution as well. *Almut-Barbara Renger* expounds on the “Pythagorean” dimension of the well-known twentieth-century global “guru” Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (a.k.a. Osho; 1931–1990), and its early traces in the works of the French esoteric author Antoine Fabre d’Olivet (1768–1825). By styling himself as the “new” Pythagoras, Bhagwan clearly drew on concepts of a perennial philosophy, of which the Greek philosopher became one of its major representatives in the course of early modern European intellectual history. Bhagwan’s *Philosophia Perennis* (1978/1979) is basically a commentary on the *Golden Verses* published by d’Olivet with a specific interpretation. Once again, the transcultural context of esoteric currents is brought to the fore.

The last contribution in this section broadens the geographical and historical horizon by introducing aspects of the history of esotericism—particularly in the nineteenth century—in the context of African- and Afro-American religions. *Hans Gerald Hödl* walks hitherto untrodden paths when likening the impact of Kardecian spiritism on the religious landscapes of Brazil, Cuba, and Puerto Rico as well as of spiritualism in New Orleans based spiritual churches. He does so through the unified lens of Brazilian, Caribbean, and Americana (Louisiana) Studies. This is yet another instance which demonstrates the immense importance and the influence of nineteenth-century occult traditions on a global scale.

The volume is concluded with *Part Four*, which provides a transcultural bridge towards India and its rich religious tradition, thereby focusing on the history of modern yoga whose reception is clearly shaped by specific occult tropes. *Keith Edward Cantú* introduces the Tamil Śaivayogi Sri Sabhapati Swami (c. 1828–1923/4) who was highly influential in nineteenth- and twentieth-century South Asian and Western esoteric movements. As his work has not been studied thoroughly thus far, Cantú’s contribution introduces Sabhapati’s life with special reference to his specific fusion of yoga and Theosophy that resulted in a rather unique system. By identifying the various impacts on this concept, the global validity of specific esoteric tropes and trajectories carried by certain networks once again become clearly evident.

Another perspective on the importance of the *prāṇa* topic is provided in the contribution by *Magdalena Kraler* by focusing on the highly influential work of Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902). As it is clearly shown, the way *prāṇa* and the closely intertwined term *ākāśa* are conceptualised in Vivekananda’s work is deeply shaped both by his specific reading of important Indian philosophical works as well as by Theosophical patterns of thought and interpretations of Indian philosophy and religion. Hence, the interconnectedness of Asian and Western esoteric concepts is demonstrated.

Marlis Lami calls attention to another (internationally) hardly known figure: the Polish philosopher, author, and socio-political activist Wincenty Lutosławski (1863–1954). Among his various works on different subjects, Lutosławski published the first handbook on yoga in the Polish language in 1909, entitled *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia* (The Development of Will Power by Means of Psychophysical Exercises). It was meant as a therapeutic instruction book but clearly draws on several tropes of the early reception of yoga in the West. These tropes are notably mingled with a specific religious and nationalist agenda as initiated by the philosopher and religious activist Andrzej Towiański (1799–1882), who is considered to be one of the leading founders of Polish messianism and was himself seminal to Polish Romanticism.

With its diverse contributions, the volume provides glimpses of the multi-faceted gamut of the occult nineteenth century, its roots, and its echoing into the realms of religion, philosophy, culture, and politics. “Occultism” here serves as an umbrella term encompassing religious strands and their exponents, which were placed by the mainstream at the fringe of or even outwith the religious or spiritual panorama of its days. Notwithstanding this general perception and the concomitant negligence in academe, the occult tradition clearly shows a certain vigour and strength, which renders it an elementary component of modern religious history, both in Europe and worldwide. As the contributions in this volume demonstrate, the impressive global occurrence of major occult themes and tropes has a flexibility, which made and still make them easily applicable in non-European contexts, that is, South Asian, East Asian, Afro- and African-American. The whole process more often than not has a reciprocal effect on the reception of specifically Asian religious and cultural traditions that were perceived as directly compatible especially with European developments. This close and mutual relation of Asia and the West (to use highly generic terms) is also a vital sign for major trends and changes that

constitute the phenomenon often referred to as “globalisation.” One of the many implications of this term is the growing interconnectedness of former long-distant cultural, social, and religious contexts that literally “grew together” and consequently crave for a common ground of explanation. Taken from this angle, “occultism” for some of its proponents served as a kind of common bond and master interpretational key that inspired an impressive network of thinkers, activists, and authors.

In addition to this specific result of the contributions in this volume, there is another feature of the occult tradition that is being emphasised: mesmerism appears as a more or less integrating and foundational aspect of occultism in the nineteenth century. It will always be the invaluable legacy of Karl Baier—to whom this volume is dedicated—who has shown how crucial this vastly ignored strand (which was, if at all, ordinarily perceived as one of the many aberrations within the seemingly linear development to “modern” science and technology) is for understanding major developments within the religious history of not only Europe but also the world at large. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (viz. his librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte) mentions the *pietra mesmerica* (the “mesmeric stone”) in his famous opera *Così fan tutte* of 1790 in an obviously comical and ironic way, likely indicating its already then disputed reputation in society. Had he known the further development and the impact of the mesmeric tradition, he might have reconsidered this somewhat snide remark.

REFERENCES

- Asprem, Egil. 2014. Beyond the West: Towards a New Comparitivism in the Study of Esotericism. *Correspondences* 2 (1): 3–33.
- Baier, Karl. 2009. *Meditation und Moderne. Zur Genese eines Kernbereichs moderner Spiritualität in der Wechselwirkung zwischen Westeuropa, Nordamerika und Asien*. Vol. 2. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.
- . 2013a. Der Magnetismus der Versenkung: Mesmeristisches Denken in Meditationsbewegungen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts. In *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Wege in die Moderne*, ed. Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, Renko Geffarth, and Markus Meumann, 407–440. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter.
- . 2013b. Mesmeric Yoga and the Development of Meditation within the Theosophical Society. *Theosophical History. A Quarterly Journal of Research* 16 (3–4): 151–161.
- . 2015. Mesmer versus Gaßner: Eine Kontroverse der 1770er Jahre und ihre Interpretationen. In *Von der Dämonologie zum Unbewussten. Die Transformation der Anthropologie um 1800*, ed. Maren Sziede and Helmut Zander, 47–83. Berlin: De Gruyter.

- . 2016. Theosophical Orientalism and the Structures of Intercultural Transfer: Annotations on the Appropriation of the *Cakras* in Early Theosophy. In *Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah, and the Transformation of Traditions*, ed. Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss, 309–354. Be'er Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press.
- . 2018. Yoga within Viennese Occultism: Carl Kellner and Co. In *Yoga in Transformation: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Karl Baier, Philipp A. Maas, and Karin Preisendanz, 387–439. Göttingen: V&R unipress.
- . 2019. Von der Iatrophysik zur romantischen Psychologie des Unbewussten. Eine Einführung in den Mesmerismus. *Entspannungsverfahren. Zeitschrift der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Entspannungsverfahren* 36: 101–132.
- . 2020. Romantischer Mesmerismus und Religion. In *Finden und Erfinden. Die Romantik und ihre Religionen*, ed. Daniel Cyranka, Diana Matut, and Christian Soboth, 13–54. Würzburg: Königshausen& Neumann.
- . 2021. Esotericism. In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal and Nickolas P. Roubekas, 2nd ed. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bauduin, Tessel M., and Henrik Johnsson, eds. 2018. *The Occult in Modernist Art, Literature, and Cinema*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bauduin, Tessel M., Victoria Ferentinou, and Daniel Zamani, eds. 2018. *Surrealism, Occultism and Politics: In Search of the Marvellous*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Bogdan, Henrik, and Gordan Djurdjevic, eds. 2015. *Occultism in a Global Perspective*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Djurdjevic, Gordan. 2014. *India and the Occult: The Influence of South Asian Spirituality on Modern Western Occultism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Granholm, Kennet. 2014. Locating the West: Problematizing the Western in Western Esotericism and Occultism. In *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, ed. Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic, 17–36. London and New York: Routledge.
- Gripentrop, Stephanie. 2015. Vom Mesmerismus zur Hypnose. Schlaglichter auf die Geschichte einer religionsverdächtigen Praxis im 19. Jahrhundert. In *Von der Dämonologie zum Unbewussten. Die Transformation der Anthropologie um 1800*, ed. Maren Sziade and Helmut Zander, 233–253. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Hanegraaff, Wouter J. 2013. *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
- . 2015. The Globalization of Esotericism. *Correspondences* 3 (1): 55–91.
- Méheust, Bertrand. 2006. Animal Magnetism/Mesmerism. In *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 75–82. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Michelis, Elizabeth de. 2004. *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism*. London and New York: Continuum.

- Owen, Alex. 2004. *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Partridge, Christopher, ed. 2015. *The Occult World*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Pasi, Marco. 2013. *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*. Durham: Acumen.
- Roukema, Aren, and Allan Kilner-Johnson. 2018. Editorial: Time to Drop the “Western”. *Correspondences* 6 (2): 109–115.

PART I

Mesmerism



CHAPTER 2

Carl August von Eschenmayer and the Somnambulic Soul

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

Bei weitem leichtgläubiger und kritikloser als Justinus Kerner war sein Freund und Landsmann Eschenmayer, der Arzt und Philosoph, als welchen ihn zwar die wissenschaftlich gebildeten Philosophen nicht gerne wollten gelten lassen, da er überwiegend aus dem Gefühl heraus grübelte. Mit seinem guten, versonnenen Gesicht ist er doch eine bemerkenswerte Erscheinung unter den schwäbischen Naturphilosophen. Im hohen Alter ließ er sich von einem Scheider, der in den Augen auch der nachsichtigen Beurteiler ein Trunkenbold und frecher Gaukler war, mit vorgespiegelten Ekstasen hinters Licht führen, so daß selbst Kerner nicht umhin konnte, den Kopf zu schütteln. Indessen sind seine Werke über Naturphilosophie und Magnetismus reich an feinen und tief sinnigen Anschauungen.

Huch 1951: 608

Nobody has done more than Karl Baier to restore the study of consciousness to a central place in the modern study of Western esotericism. Among

W. J. Hanegraaff (✉)

University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

e-mail: W.J.Hanegraaff@uva.nl

© The Author(s) 2021

L. Pokorny, F. Winter (eds.), *The Occult Nineteenth Century*,
Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55318-0_2

the many highly relevant, fascinating, but sadly forgotten key figures discussed in the first volume of Baier's magnum opus *Meditation und Moderne* (2009), we encounter the Souabian *Naturphilosoph*, pioneer of Romantic psychology, and advocate of magnetic somnambulism Carl August von Eschenmayer (1768–1852).¹ When Ricarda Huch described him in her classic book on Romanticism, she was clearly echoing Karl Immermann's (1796–1840) popular satirical novel *Münchhausen* (1841), where Eschenmayer and his buddy Justinus Kerner (1786–1862) are lampooned as a comical duo of superstitious fools named “Eschenmichel” and “Kernbeisser.”² And yet, Huch admits that Eschenmayer's writings about *Naturphilosophie* and animal magnetism were full of “delicate and profound” observations. So who was Eschenmayer, and how do we explain these conflicting assessments? While a few good discussions are available in German and French,³ it seems typical of the near-total oblivion into which Eschenmayer has fallen that this chapter happens to be the very first one about him in English. I will provide a general overview of Eschenmayer's life and development, with special attention to the psychology he built on German Idealist foundations and to the role of animal magnetism and Somnambulatory trance in that context.

FROM PHILOSOPHICAL IDEALISM TO ANIMAL MAGNETISM

Born in Neuenbürg on July 4, 1768, young Eschenmayer was destined by his father for a commercial career, but finally managed to get himself accepted as a student of medicine at the Carlsakademie in Stuttgart. After his father's death in 1793, he transferred to the University of Tübingen where he continued his medical studies but devoted himself to philosophy as well. A decisive influence on his later career came from reading the works of Ernst Platner (1744–1818), a follower of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) whose writings were important also to Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805). In his *Anthropologie* (1772), Platner presented man as a unity of body and soul who, therefore, could only be understood in terms of a philosophical

¹ Baier 2009, vol. 1: 207–209. Eschenmayer's first name “Adolph” was never used, and there is no basis for the name “Adam” that has been often attributed to him (Malkani 1994a, vol. 2: 229 n. 1).

² Immermann 1841, vol. 2: 129–189 (Book 4: “Poltergeister in und um Weinsberg”).

³ For Eschenmayer's biography I rely mainly on Malkani 1994a, b. See also Kerner 1853; Erdmann 1982 [1853]; Holstein 1979; Maier 2009; Schulze 1958; Wuttke 1966.

synthesis comprising the sciences of physiology and psychology (Platner 1772; see also Platner 1793). Another major influence was Kant, whose philosophy Eschenmayer studied in private sessions with his professor Jakob Friedrich von Abel (1751–1829), whom he would later succeed. Of major importance for Eschenmayer’s thinking were von Abel’s *Einleitung in die Seelenlehre* (Introduction to the Doctrine of Souls, 1786) and his *Philosophische Untersuchungen über die Verbindung der Menschen mit höhern Geistern* (Philosophical Investigations about Humanity’s Connection with Higher Spirits, 1791). From these titles alone, in combination with Platner’s work (not to mention Kant’s *Träume eines Geistersehers*, 1766), it is evident that Eschenmayer’s interest in the human soul and its relation to the *Geisterwelt* (spirit world) began early and was anything but idiosyncratic.

Eschenmayer’s medical dissertation of 1796⁴ caught Schelling’s attention, which led to an intense correspondence and collaboration between the two philosophers (Gilson 1988; Durner 2001; Roux 2005). Today, Eschenmayer is generally seen as one of Schelling’s most significant sparring partners during the latter’s decisive years around 1800: Schelling developed his early *Natur- und Identitätsphilosophie* in a context of intense discussions with Eschenmayer, even claiming ownership for several crucial insights that he had actually taken from the latter. Particularly important in this regard is Eschenmayer’s article “Spontaneität = Weltseele” (“Spontaneity = World Soul,” published in Schelling’s *Zeitschrift für spekulative Philosophie* in 1801) and *Die Philosophie in ihrem Übergang zur Nichtphilosophie* (Philosophy in its Transition to Non-Philosophy, 1803). Schelling responded to it with his *Philosophie und Religion* (Philosophy and Religion, 1804), but it finally caused a break between the two philosophers. The essential difference between them was that Schelling believed philosophy to be capable of understanding the Absolute through intellectual analysis, whereas Eschenmayer held that the Absolute (God) transcended the capacities of the human intellect altogether and could only be grasped by faith. Put very briefly and simply, Schelling insisted on the primacy of philosophy whereas for Eschenmayer ultimate fulfilment could only be achieved in Christian belief. This should not lead us to think that Eschenmayer responded to Schelling with expressions of Christian piety—on the contrary, we are dealing with an extremely technical debate

⁴Eschenmayer 1796. Significantly, the dissertation was followed immediately by an application of its theoretical framework to the phenomena of magnetism (Eschenmayer 1798).

at the highest level of philosophical sophistication as practised during this period. In addition, Eschenmayer tried reaching out to a wider audience by means of a philosophical dialogue “about the Sacred and History” titled *Der Eremit und der Fremdling* (The Hermit and the Stranger, 1805), in which he argued that philosophy needed to accept the concept of the Fall.⁵

Eschenmayer wrote these works while making his living as a physician in Kirchheim unter Teck, but went on to pursue an academic career. He became an extraordinary professor of medicine and philosophy at the University of Tübingen in 1811 and was offered an ordinary professorship in philosophy one year later. His first major book written while occupying this academic position appeared in 1816: *Versuch, die scheinbare Magie des thierischen Magnetismus aus physiologischen und psychischen Gesezen zu erklären* (An Attempt to Explain the Apparent Magic of Animal Magnetism from Physiological and Psychical Laws). One might be surprised that Eschenmayer chose to launch his official academic career with this particular topic, but in fact it makes perfect sense. Whereas his first *Versuch* about magnetism (published in 1789, immediately after his dissertation) had been focused on the strictly physical manifestations of magnetism, this second *Versuch* now addressed its strange “spiritual” counterpart.

This twofold approach followed logically from the principles of a broadly Schellingian *Naturphilosophie*, grounded in a dialectical polarisation of the Subject of knowledge (Man) and its Object (Nature). In this framework, the human subject is defined as the principle of absolute Freedom (Spirit) and objective nature as that of absolute Necessity (Matter). Caught in this polar dynamic, the soul has an inborn tendency pulling it up towards Spirit/Freedom while the bodily organism has the contrary tendency of pulling it down towards Matter/Necessity. From these principles, it follows that speculative philosophy must be particularly interested in the ambiguous point of “mediation” (or *Indifferenzpunkt*, indicated as o) between the positive spiritual principle (+) and its negative material counterpart (−). It is in the living organism (whether that of the macrocosmic world or that of man as its microcosmic parallel, both understood as embodied soul = animated body) that this paradoxical encounter takes place. The *Indifferenz* (o) is the very principle of life, “the unifying bond of nature” (Eschenmayer 1817: 20), and its central manifestation is

⁵As explained by Faivre (2008: 209–210), the basic understanding of Fall and reintegration in the milieu around Kerner and Eschenmayer was grounded in Christian Theosophy.

what we refer to as consciousness or, more precisely, self-consciousness (*Selbstbewußtsein*). Eschenmayer believed that it could be studied empirically and even experimentally in the phenomena of animal magnetism—an assumption that might seem like a stretch to us but was in fact quite logical. Mesmer’s theory, after all, had emerged from his own observations of a polar magnetism active in the human organism (reflecting the polarity of the earth), and this made it a natural match for Schelling’s polar dialectics. Moreover, from the same *Natur*-philosophical perspective, it made perfect sense that animal magnetism seemed to demonstrate the enormous, “seemingly magical” feats that the soul should be expected to possess under conditions of relative liberation from the habitual constraints of natural law.

What we find here is a conceptual framework that would become central to the Romantic doctrine of the “nightside of nature”: a perfect reversal of common Enlightenment assumptions about the “light of reason” and its relation to the “darkness of the irrational” (Hanegraaff 2012: 260–266). While the spirit and the body are active and awake, the laws of necessity are predominant over the spiritual principle of freedom, and hence the soul is rendered passive. However, as the body is in a condition of sleep or trance, this allows the spiritual principle of freedom to liberate itself from the constraints of necessity, and its mysterious powers can become manifest. The internal logic is compelling indeed.

ESCHENMAYER’S PSYCHOLOGY

Eschenmayer’s work must be seen in the wider context of a tradition known as *Erfahrungsseelenkunde* (literally, “psychology of experience”). At its origin stood Karl-Philipp Moritz (1756–1793), the famous author of the first German psychological novel *Anton Reiser* (1785–1790). Moritz’s *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*, published from 1783 to 1793 with the motto *Gnothi seautón*, is considered the first psychological journal in Germany (Geyer 2014: 21–23; cf. Béguin 1939: 21–45; Bell 2005: 89–105, esp. 94–97), and it is in this field that Eschenmayer was teaching at the University of Tübingen since 1811, as the first professor in Württemberg for *psychische Heilkunde*. In Schellingian terms, the laws of Nature were modifications of spiritual laws that were to be found in the thinking Subject; and because Nature and the Subject had to be ultimately identical on the level of the Absolute, one had to assume profound analogies (rather than causal connections) between the two realms. Thus one

could arrive at not just the possibility, but the *necessity* of a foundational science that would unify the Natural Sciences and the Humanities. As Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) would do much later (Shamdasani 2003: 15 and 18–22; Hanegraaff 2012: 285–286), Eschenmayer argued that this science could be nothing else than psychology, the study of the soul (Wuttke 1966: 263).

Eschenmayer’s hefty book about that topic was first published in 1817, followed by a second revised edition in 1822. It was divided into three parts devoted to “empirical,” “pure,” and “practical” or “applied” psychology. Eschenmayer was the first to admit that the final part remained sketchy and insufficient (Eschenmayer 1982 [1822]: xiii), and I will not go into a detailed discussion of it here. His “pure” psychology amounted to a speculative philosophy of consciousness that seeks to analyse the logical essence of its three basic functions (thinking, feeling, and willing) from an a priori point of view (for a short analysis, see Erdman 1982 [1853]: 267–269). The “empirical” part of psychology was based upon the same triad, but now approached from an a posteriori perspective, and it is this part that most closely resembles what we would describe as psychology today.

True to the basic dialectical principles of Eschenmayer’s Schellingian *Naturphilosophie*, the soul should be seen neither as an object nor as a subject. Its true essence had to transcend the very domain of philosophy as such, because its ultimate foundation was in the mysterious realm of the Absolute to which only faith gives access. All this is clear from the very first lines of Eschenmayer’s book, which deal with the object of psychology:

The soul is the singular primal force from which emanates our entire spiritual existence. All our spiritual capacities and functions are just manifestations, directions, externalizations of the one undivided primal force. But these capacities and functions are ordered along a scale of dignity. The closer they are to the primal source, the more excellent, the more free, and the more universal they are. To the extent that they distance themselves from it, and become subject to reflexes, they become murkier, less free, and more empirical.

Right from the outset, we can consider the soul from two main directions:

- (1) According to her *urbildliches Leben* in which, according to Plato, she is pure and untroubled by the connections of a planetary life in time, and beholds the ideas of Truth, Beauty, and Virtue.