

## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

KENNETH GRANT AND THE  
TYPHONIAN TRADITION

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## INTRODUCTION

The presence of the British author Kenneth Grant (1924–2011) looms large over the history of modern occultism. Apart from having collaborated with, and later promoted the works of influential occultists such as Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) and Austin Osman Spare (1886–1956), Grant is known as the expounder of a particular current in contemporary occultism usually referred to as the ‘Typhonian Tradition.’ This current can best be described as both a synthesis and re-reading of history through the lenses of an occultist worldview composed of such diverse traditions as Thelema, Neo-Vedanta, Hindu Tantra, Western Sexual Magic, Surrealism, ufology, and Lovecraftian gnosis; but the Typhonian Tradition as described by Grant in his ‘Typhonian Trilogies’ can also be seen as a practical epistemological system aimed at spiritual enlightenment and the transcending of the illusion of duality.

Part of the appeal to the works of Grant is probably due to the fact that little is known about him as a person apart from the bits and pieces of his autobiography which are revealed in his writings. Grant led a private and quiet life in Northern London and for the last two or three decades he became increasingly reclusive, which helped to foster the image of Grant as a mysterious and enigmatic person. In contrast to many other occultists, Grant never gave any lectures or participated in public events. To Grant, the prime and most efficient mode of communication was through the written word, as expressed in the only interview that he ever gave: ‘The silent or printed word is more potent than its spoken counterpart...and it reaches those for whom it is intended...Books...have been known to change lives. My own life was changed by Crowley’s *Magick*’ (Grant 1990: 5–7).

The book referred to above is Aleister Crowley’s magnum opus *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1930), which Grant came across at the age of 15 at Zwemmers in Charing Cross Road. Grant, who had already read occultist authors such as Blavatsky, was deeply impressed by the book and eventually he managed to get in contact with the author personally. After a brief exchange of letters, Grant was invited on 10 December 1944 to visit Crowley at the Bell Inn, in Buckinghamshire. As noted by

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Crowley in his diary, he took a liking to Grant and shortly thereafter hired the then 20-year-old Grant as his secretary for a brief period when he had relocated to Netherwood, a lodging house outside Hastings. Although Grant's stay with Crowley at Netherwood was short, it had a profound impact upon him and he would for the rest of his life continue to study the works of 'the Beast 666' (i.e. Crowley) and identify himself as a thelemite, an adherent of the new religion Thelema of which Crowley was the prophet.

In 1948, the year after Crowley had died, Grant was formally acknowledged as a ninth degree member of the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO) by Karl J. Germer (1885–1962) who had succeeded Crowley as the head of the order. The OTO was a mixed masonic organisation of German origin which Crowley had seized control of in 1922, and which taught sexual magic in its highest degrees, i.e. the ninth and eleventh degrees (the tenth degree was an administrative degree reserved for national heads of the organisation). Later, on 5 March 1951, Germer issued a charter to Grant to open a camp of the order in London and Grant devoted himself to organising OTO work in London and publishing a manifesto of the British Branch of the OTO (1952) with the help of Cecil Williamson (1909–99), the founder of the Museum of witchcraft at Castletown on the Isle of Man.

The 1950s proved to be a turbulent and formative period for Grant. It was mainly during this period that Grant encountered and experimented with many of the diverse traditions that subsequently were synthesised into the Typhonian Tradition. Chief among these influences were—apart from the works of Crowley which Grant at this period was in a unique position to study since he was being employed by the Crowley collector Gerald Yorke (1901–83) to copy all of Crowley's unpublished writings, including letters and diaries—Hindu traditions such as Tantra and Advaita (see below) and the eldritch work and art of Austin Osman Spare. Grant was introduced to Spare through his wife Steffi in 1949 and a deep and lasting friendship developed between Spare and the young couple. The interest that they took in his art helped to rekindle not only Spare's artistic output, but also the development of his magical system, which was codified with the help of Grant into the Zos Kia Cultus (Baker 2011). Upon Spare's death in 1956, Grant acted as his literary executor and he would later be instrumental in the renewed interest in Spare through his Typhonian Trilogies and his books *Images and Oracles of Austin Osman Spare* (1975), and *Zos Speaks! Encounters With Austin Osman Spare* (1998), the latter co-written with Steffi Grant.

The first part of the 1950s was characterised by experiment and innovation in terms of the magical work carried out by Grant within loosely formed groups connected to the OTO and other obscure orders such as the I.B.A., of which very little is known. Much of this work culminated in the formation of the New Isis Lodge, founded in 1955. The lodge, which was founded as an OTO body, was announced in an eight-page pamphlet entitled *Manifesto of New Isis Lodge O.T.O.* (1955). The most conspicuous aspect of this manifesto is the claim that 'a new and compelling influence is enveloping the earth' and that 'its rays proceed from a source as yet unexplored by those who are not at one with it in essence and in spirit and it finds its present focus in the outer universe in the transplutonic planet Isis' (Grant 1955: 1). This alleged planet is, according to the manifesto, to be linked to the goddess Nuith, and thereby to the first chapter of Crowley's *The Book of the Law*, and it was the special task of the New Isis Lodge to channel the power and energy

that emanates from the planet (Grant 1992). Germer, however, strongly objected to the manifesto and on July 20, 1955, he formally revoked the charter and expelled Grant from the OTO. Grant ignored Germer's letter of expulsion and continued to operate the New Isis Lodge until 1962 on the basis of 'inner Plane' powers. The group had, according to Grant, around 30 active members, who met every seventh Friday at the lodge premises in London, which at least for a while were located in the basement of a furrier's shop on 7a Melcombe Street, just off Baker Street (Bogdan 2010). The experiences drawn from the ritual workings of the New Isis Lodge seem to have had a profound effect upon Kenneth Grant, and he frequently returns to this lodge in his later published works, especially in *Hecate's Fountain* (1992) which is one of Grant's most popular books.

The break with Germer and the expulsion from the OTO are important for the understanding of Grant's subsequent activities in the New Isis Lodge, as this made it possible for Grant to develop his own, idiosyncratic understanding of Thelema and the OTO. While Grant does not explain the nature of the inner plane powers on which he based his legitimacy as a leader of the OTO subsequent to the falling out with Germer, it seems probable that they are connected to the transmissions from the New Isis planet, and in particular the two texts *Wisdom of S'lba* and *OKBISh*, or *The Book of the Spider*. These texts were channelled by the members of the New Isis lodge in the 1950s and later published by Grant in *Outer Gateways* (1994) and *The Ninth Arch* (2002).

After the closure of the New Isis Lodge in 1962, there followed a seven-year hiatus of which time little is known, but by 1969 and the publication of Crowley's autobiography, *The Confessions* (which Grant co-edited with John Symonds), Grant would start to refer to himself as the Rex Supremus or international leader of the OTO. During 1970s *The Confessions* was followed by several other works by Crowley that were co-edited by Grant and Symonds, and in 1972 the first book in a series of three trilogies (nine books in total) was published, entitled *The Magical Revival*.<sup>1</sup> As mentioned, these trilogies are referred to as the Typhonian Trilogies, and the ninth and final volume, *The Ninth Arch*, was published thirty years later, in 2002. It was also around the time that the first volume of the trilogies appeared that the so-called Typhonian OTO emerged, with its first official announcement published ca. 1973. The Typhonian OTO preserved the degree structure of the OTO under Crowley, but dispensed of virtually all masonic-style rituals, revised the teachings of sexual magic and became tightly connected to the Typhonian Tradition as laid out in the trilogies. The Typhonian OTO would later (in 2011) change its name to the Typhonian Order, and after Kenneth Grant's passing in 2011, the leadership of the order was passed to his friend and collaborator Michael Staley.

### THE TYPHONIAN TRADITION AND THE NIGHTSIDE OF EXISTENCE

The Typhonian Tradition as described by Grant in his books, can be seen as both a particular interpretation of history and as a specific form of epistemology. In many ways the notion of a Typhonian Tradition lies at the core of Grant's work and he claimed that Crowley's religio-magical system—and by extension his own work—was a revival of this 'ancient' tradition. Grant's understanding of the Typhonian

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Tradition evolved over the course of the thirty-year period that it took to complete the Typhonian Trilogies, from 1972 to 2002. Although the basic concept of this tradition is present already in the first book of the series, *The Magical Revival* (1972), it is from the third book, *Cults of the Shadow* (1975) and onwards that the reader encounters the actual term, and Grant devoted increasing attention to exploring and explaining the Typhonian Tradition in the subsequent books. Drawing heavily on the works of the self-taught Egyptologist Gerald Massey (1828–1907) and his comparative approach to ancient mythologies, Grant described the Typhonian Tradition as ‘the primal African Cult in its ancient Egyptian or Draconian form. Typhon, or Taurt, represented the first light in darkness as the circumpolar complex of seven stars that gave her the name of the Dragon of the Deep. Her seven stars, or souls, were manifested by Set, her son in the South, who, as the eighth was the culmination or height of her light and the first male deity ever to be worshipped’ (Grant 1975: 231). In other words, the arch-monster Typhon, opponent to Zeus according to the Greek mythology, is identified with the Egyptian goddess Taurt (Taweret, ‘the great [female] one’), described by Grant as either the mother or a feminine aspect of Seth. To Grant, the worship of Taurt or Typhon represented the oldest form of religion known to mankind, a religion that centered on the worship of the stars and the sacred powers of procreation and sexuality. The Egyptian god Seth plays a particularly important role in the Typhonian Tradition; not only is he believed to have been the first male god ever worshiped, but he is also considered to have evolved into Satan, the adversary to the Christian God. Due to the antinomian nature of this deity, he has throughout history been identified with evil and sinister forces by its adversaries. Through an etymological analysis, inspired by Crowley and others, Grant argues that Seth was transformed into Shaitan (according to Grant the prime God worshipped by the Yezidis), and later into Satan. Probably inspired by nineteenth-century theories on the possibility of understanding the essence of religion through the study of its origins, Grant maintained that the Typhonian Tradition, and in particular the god Seth, represents the ‘hidden’, ‘concealed’ or repressed aspect of our psyche which it is vital to explore in order to reach gnosis or spiritual enlightenment.

In his trilogies Grant discusses various techniques whereby initiates can explore the hidden aspects of the psyche. Chief among these, is the ‘nightside’ or reverse of the kabbalistic Tree of Life, the Qlipoth (Woudenberg 2010). The Tree of Life is the most common glyph or diagram used by occultists to describe the order of the universe as well as the human mind, as expressed for instance in the initiatory system of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and in Crowley’s initiatic order the A A (1907), of which Grant became a member after he had met Crowley in 1944. Just as Grant gradually came to emphasise the Typhonian Tradition in his trilogies, the emphasis on the practical means of exploring the Qlipoth increased after the publication of the fifth book in the series, *Nightside of Eden* (1977). In the introduction to this book, Grant stated:

Full magical initiation is not possible without an understanding of the so-called qliphotic paths which are, in practice, as real as the shadow of any object illuminated by the sun. (...) It is only after mastering the world of the shadows within himself in the form of arch-demons, anger, lust, and pride, that man may

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truly claim to be the Lord of the Shining Wheels or Disks [i.e. the ten Sephiroth of the Tree of Life].

(Grant 1977: 1-2)

Again, Grant's understanding of key-topics covered in his books evolved, and the nature of the Qlipoth changed drastically as they increasingly became identified with a means of establishing contact with extraterrestrial life-forms, or powers beyond terrestrial consciousness.

### CONTACT WITH NON-HUMAN ENTITIES AND THE MAUVE ZONE

The Mauve Zone, a key-concept in Grant's system first mentioned in *Hecate's fountain* (1992), is related to a practical formula of dream control evolved by Grant during the years 1955-62, when 'New Isis Lodge was founded for the purposes of traffic with the Outer Ones' (Grant 1994: 7). In his writings, Grant repeatedly stresses the importance of establishing contact with higher beings for the spiritual evolution of the practitioner, but also for the future of mankind. Grant goes a long way in trying to explain the nature of these higher beings, drawing not only on traditional esoteric concepts, but also on the notion of aliens in the post-1947 UFO-milieu, and the Lovecraftian mythos of the Great Old Ones—ancient beings from Outer Space who are waiting to re-enter the human world. It should be emphasised that Grant differs from Crowley in his understanding of these entities: whereas Crowley adopted an agnostic approach to the nature of the entities encountered in ritual magic, Grant argues that they are actual entities existing outside of man's consciousness although they are to be accessed through a mental state which Grant calls the Mauve Zone:

Above and beyond this, the book endeavours to follow the workings of these phenomena in dimensions that scientists are only just beginning to explore. These dimensions, which may be considered as existing outside or between the two states of dreaming and waking, I have called the Mauve Zone. It includes and excludes both simultaneously. The designation comports occult overtones needing no explanation to those acquainted with the function of Daäth [i.e. the 'hidden' sphere on the Tree of Life which Grant sees as the entrance to its nightside] as the gate of Ingress and of Egress to the other side of the Tree of Life. To those not so acquainted, the Mauve Zone may be said to have mythical analogue in the symbol of the *Crimson Desert* of the Arabs, which, according to Lovecraft, was the ancient equivalent of the *Roba el Khaliyeh*, a zone reputedly haunted by evil spirits and monsters of death.

(Grant 1992: Foreword)

Grant was, however, ambivalent towards extraterrestrial contacts. On the one hand he warned against the Outer Ones or extraterrestrial powers and that they would somehow be linked to an imminent catastrophe or worldwide destruction of civilisation, as we know it. On the other hand, he argued that it is only through contact with these alien forces that mankind can progress, and that his books 'indicate

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certain “gateways” through which alien forms of consciousness may manifest to Man, and through which Man may go to meet them’ (Grant 1990).

### NECRONOMICON GNOSIS AND THE DERANGEMENT OF THE SENSES

The reference to Lovecraft in the quote above regarding the Mauve Zone was not accidental. In fact, according to Grant, Lovecraft had through his dreams unconsciously tapped into the same magical current that Crowley was consciously in contact with (Levenda 2013). The fictional works of Lovecraft – particularly those connected to the Chtulhu mythos (or Necronomicon Gnosis as Grant calls it), did not only correspond to Crowley’s Law of Thelema and *The Book of the Law*, but more importantly explain and give deeper understanding of them. But Grant went beyond a mere interpretation of Thelema through the works of Lovecraft and he claims to have performed (during the days of the New Isis lodge) rituals to invoke entities from the Chtulhu mythos: he describes for instance a ritual carried out at the Summer Solstice aimed at invoking the Great Old One Yog-Sothoth, and on another occasion he refers to the lodge-members of New Isis as votaries of Chtulhu (Grant 1992). It is apparent that Grant’s use of Lovecraft’s fictional work—but also that of other authors such as Arthur Machen (1863–1947) and Sax Rohmer (Arthur Henry Sarsfield Ward, 1883–1959)—was not restricted to a comparative enterprise, but seems to have had a more practical function in the sense of challenging the way that the reader sees fiction and reality. In this Grant was influenced by Surrealists such as Salvador Dalí (1904–89) and their method of challenging the notion of the real, and in particular referred to Arthur Rimbaud’s (1854–91) formula of total derangement of the senses, which to Grant meant an active overstimulation of the senses which would lead to the mind opening up for the experience of, and communication with, entities in the Mauve Zone. In fact, when asked what the purpose of his books is, Grant replied: ‘To provide concepts that are essentially strange so that the faculty of intuitive insight may be awakened and aligned with such alien concepts [as UFO’s and similar phenomena]’ (Grant 1990).

### NEO-VEDANTA, TANTRA, AND THE LEFT-HAND PATH

It could be argued that Grant’s use of fiction is directly linked to the fact that he embraced teachings of non-duality and hindu advaita. In the 1950s Grant immersed himself in Hindu philosophy and religion, especially the teachings of ‘the Sage of Arunachala,’ Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950), and wrote a number of articles on Advaita Vedanta for Indian journals such as *The Call Divine*, published in Bombay. According to Grant, the notion that reality is composed of an objective and a subjective world, or an inner and outer world, is an illusion that one has to be freed from. By mixing fiction with historical fact the border between these worlds is increasingly being questioned, and ultimately it can be transcended.

The encounter with advaita during the early 1950s, was probably prompted by a deep-seated fascination with the Orient, especially with the religious and mystical traditions of India. In fact, Grant had volunteered for the army at the age of eighteen, with the expectation of being sent to India, where he had hopes of finding a guru

(Grant 1991). Although ill health led to his discharge from the army and thus prevented him from reaching India, he did manage to find an Eastern guru of sorts, in the unlikely person of David Curwen (1893–1984), a furrier of Jewish origin living in London. Grant met Curwen through Aleister Crowley, who had admitted the former to the ninth degree of the OTO in 1945. Curwen was, however, no newcomer to the occult and he had been taught Tantrik theory in the 1930s by an Indian guru, Swami Pareswara Bikshu (Bogdan 2010). After Crowley's death Curwen initiated Grant into the mysteries of Tantra, and Grant would later incorporate this knowledge in his version of the OTO; as with Crowley, the eighth degree dealt with masturbation and the ninth degree with heterosexual sex while the eleventh degree in contrast to Crowley's system did not deal with anal sex, but with heterosexual sex during menstruation. According to Grant, Crowley was not aware of the Tantric theories on the importance of the female sexual fluids (that Grant had learnt from Curwen), which Grant calls *kalas*. Grant describes the *kalas* as psycho-sexual secretions of the Tantric *suvasini* or female tantric adept of the Left-Hand Path, and goes on to state that there are sixteen different *kalas* that practitioners of sexual magic deal with and that these form the bases, together with the male fluids, of the Elixir (Grant 1973: 211–12). Furthermore, Grant argued that the Left-Hand Path was, in fact, an Indian manifestation of the Egyptian pre-dynastic cult of the Great Goddess, and that tantra is thus essential for the understanding of the Typhonian Tradition.

## NOTE

- 1 The Typhonian Trilogies consist of; First series: *The Magical Revival* (1972), *Aleister Crowley & the Hidden God* (1973), *Cults of the Shadow* (1975); Second series: *Nightside of Eden* (1977), *Outside the Circles of Time* (1980), *Hecate's Fountain* (1992); Third series: *Outer Gateways* (1994), *Beyond the Mauve Zone* (1999), *The Ninth Arch* (2002). For a complete bibliography of Grant, see Bogdan 2014a.

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