

CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR
INTERMEDIARY BEINGS

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Egil Asprem

The theme of mediation plays a central role in much of Western esotericism (Faivre, 1994). Practices that are focused on achieving radical metaphysical insights, gain higher knowledge, or transform the self and the world, will always need to account for how the practitioner can get access to such rarefied goods. Interaction with mediating beings of various sorts often does the job; these postulated entities have access to powers and knowledge way beyond our own, but are still close enough to us to make contact and interaction possible. This overview chapter charts some of the main types of intermediary beings encountered in the world of Western esotericism, discusses some key functions these tend to perform, and considers some important trends in the historical development of intermediaries in this context.

TYPES OF INTERMEDIARY BEINGS

One encounters a broad variety of intermediary beings in the context of Western esotericism, from angels and demons, to aliens and the spirits of the dead. It may be helpful to attempt a crude classification of common intermediaries based on the natures ascribed to them as well as their cultural origin. While there is no claim of completeness to the following categories, they pick out some dominant trends that we will return to later in this chapter.

Beings Related to the Judeo-Christian Pantheon

The first and most dominant category contains intermediary beings related to the Judeo-Christian pantheon. This includes entities that are known from Christian liturgy and take on ritual functions there, such as the virgin Mary, the saints, Jesus Christ, and the major angels. Practices related to these intermediaries abounded in medieval magical ritual and heterodox visionary practice, as testified by the *Ars Notoria*, the *Liber visionum* and many other surviving magical books and grimoires (Davies, 2010; cf. Fanger, 2005). Contact with angels is especially pervasive in Western religious history. In occult and esoteric practices these beings often appear in visions or even as the object of ritual invocations.

But this class of 'Judeo-Christian' intermediaries does not limit itself to specific entities named by the liturgy, the biblical texts or commentaries, nor for that matter to intermediaries that are on the side of Heaven. The esoteric interaction with intermediaries is much too creative to be limited by canonical texts and established meanings; thus, we also include in this category the numerous angelic and demonic beings that theologians will never have heard of, and which, for that precise reason, have tended to be viewed with suspicion. In esoteric practice, all these subtypes may occur together, as excellently illustrated by John Dee's famous angel conversations of the late sixteenth century (Harkness, 1999). Here, known archangels such as Michael appear in the crystal ball alongside very idiosyncratic beings with names like Madimi, Ave, and Nalvage. At one point during the conversations, Jesus Christ himself appears to convince the magician in a particularly controversial issue. The angels, furthermore, instruct on ways to contact an enormous array of other spirit beings, some of them demons.

Besides the Christian liturgy and the innovation of individual practitioners, a major source of these mediators, as well as some of the practices surrounding them, is found in Jewish mysticism. With the spread of kabbalistic literature in Europe following the interest in it by Christian humanist scholars and the invention of printing, an enormous world of angelic and demonic mediators was opened up.

Cosmological Intermediaries

For lack of a better terminology, a second category of note can be referred to as cosmological intermediaries. This term is meant to designate a broad class of intermediary beings that have been postulated, theorized, and mapped in a number of philosophical and theological contexts since antiquity, most notably in neoplatonic philosophy (especially Iamblichus and Proclus), the *Chaldean Oracles* (second century), the *Hermetica* (second–third centuries), and in gnosticism. There is a degree of overlap with the previous category, especially through the influence that the neoplatonic cosmologies have had on hierarchical angelologies and demonologies through for example, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. The point about this category is however not only to identify a cultural pedigree separate from the Judeo-Christian one, but to pinpoint the centrality of intermediary spirits that are connected with cosmological functions. The seven Gnostic Archons were, for example, involved with the creation of the physical world, and connected to the seven classical planets. In the sixteenth century, Cornelius Agrippa gives the names, seals, and correspondences of both the (malevolent) spirits and (benevolent) intelligences that rule the planets. There are spirits that rule specific times, from hours and days to years and entire ages (see for example, Johannes Trithemius), and there are spirits connected to geographical regions of the earth. There are also spirits of the elements; the most influential arrangement of these come from Paracelsus, who talks of gnomes (earth), salamanders (fires), sylphs (air), and undines (water). All of these entities become available for evocation, conversation, and manipulation through ritual practices.

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Initiated Humans

A third category of intermediary beings that has become very common in modern esotericism takes us somewhat closer to home: other human beings who have become initiated, transformed, or otherwise had their status elevated to such a degree that they can take the role of intermediaries for others. There is a key focus here on concepts such as initiation, personal transmutation, and apotheosis. From the perspective of comparative religion, this is not an uncommon category of intermediaries; we may, for example, think of the doctrines and practices associated with Bodhisattvas in Buddhism. In the West, something comparable only appears to have developed quite late, and primarily in the context of Western esotericism and the mythology of secret societies. In the seventeenth century, the Rosicrucian manifestos popularized the idea of a secret brotherhood of adepts working silently to perform benevolent acts to the transformation of the world and the salvation of humanity. In the developing mythology, these adepts would have acquired superhuman powers and possibly even immortality. The appeal to mysterious ‘secret chiefs’ became a central feature of the new institutional formations of the nineteenth century occult revival, often trading heavily on the Rosicrucian mythology (see e.g. Bogdan, 2007). The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn claimed to have been instigated by mysterious Rosicrucian adepts in Germany, while the Theosophical Society depended on contact with hidden masters in Tibet. In the twentieth century, the various splinters from Theosophy and the Golden Dawn have taken this mythology in new directions that radicalize the otherness of these adepts, chiefs, or masters. The masters are not only hidden in the sense of being in secret locations, but also disembodied or ascended to higher spheres of existence – from which they may still communicate with the chosen this-worldly adepts who know how to dial.

The Dead as Intermediaries

On a global scale, the spirits of the dead are among the most pervasive types of intermediary beings there are (Poo, ed., 2009). Ancestral spirits are at the center of religious praxis around the world, and non-institutionalized, improvised beliefs and practices concerning the dead (whether friendly or hostile) are abundant in mythology, literature, and folklore. When it comes to Western esotericism, the spirits of the dead have taken a special position as mediators of religious knowledge in the currents associated with Spiritualism. Emmanuel Swedenborg opened the door to a more central theological role of dead spirits through his view that the angels and demons have themselves developed from human spirits, creating a continuity between ghosts and higher or lower mediators. Swedenborgian Christianity was an important influence on the development of spiritualist theology in the nineteenth century, as seen for example in the work of Andrew Jackson Davis. A different theological direction was taken by French spiritualist Allan Kardec, who combined spiritualist practice with (among other things) a doctrine of metempsychosis (cf. Monroe, 2008). Common for all the theologizing trends in spiritualism, however, is that the communication with the dead through mediums become something more than just an attempt to meet once again with lost loved ones: the spirits become full-blown mediators of higher knowledge about religious truths, and especially about the afterworld and the nature of the human soul.

Pagan Intermediaries

With the emergence of neopaganism in the twentieth century, the gods, heroes, and spirits of pre-Christian mythology have come alive again as viable intermediary beings. Not only are the gods of various pantheons (e.g. Greek, Roman, Norse) available for worship, but they can also be communicated with, and prayed to for help with specific problems. Moreover, with an increased valorization of 'pagan' belief systems, various nature spirits and magical beings such as gnomes, elves, and fairies become available and relevant once more as well.

Aliens

Extraterrestrial intelligences have become increasingly popular as intermediary beings. While UFO sightings, bedside visitations and alien abduction stories have had a broad cultural impact since Roswell, the aliens portrayed through the contactee movement in the late 1940s and 1950s have been particularly influential on their role as intermediary beings in esoteric contexts. The message from the 'Space Brothers' of global peace, nuclear disarmament, and universal brotherhood – coupled with warnings of impending doom, and a conspiracy to keep their wisdom hidden – have continued to funnel through the channellers of the New Age movement (cf. Hanegraaff 1996). But the cultural script of aliens is also available to other modes of experience and to different kinds of messages; thus, we find the alien as intermediary being in several other movements, from Kenneth Grant's Typhonian OTO to full-blown UFO religions such as Heaven's Gate or the Raelians.

Fiction-based Intermediaries

A final type of intermediaries that could be distinguished due to the specific cultural creativity that they signify are the beings that have been culled from explicit works of fiction, whether literature, film, comics or television (cf. Davidsen, 2013). While there is nothing new in works intended as fiction influencing religious thought and practice (think of Dante or John Milton), they have usually been successful in doing so by creatively elaborating on and visualizing the dominant established worldview. In more recent times we see works of fiction that portray a wholly alternative worldview getting adopted as prescriptive texts for practice. Thus, in terms of intermediaries, we find occultists incorporating Tolkien's mythology of Middle Earth, performing rituals to contact the Valar, or gods of Middle Earth (Davidsen, 2012). One of the most influential fictitious worldviews to have exerted influence on occult practice is H. P. Lovecraft's cthulhu mythos. The 'Great Old Ones' are invoked by real-life 'cultists,' mostly of a chaos magical and Left-Hand Path orientation. Rituals for working with Lovecraftian entities were published with *The Satanic Rituals* (1972), written by Michael Aquino, the founder of the Temple of Set. Several versions of the fictitious grimoire *Necronomicon* have since appeared in print (Harms and Gonce, 2003).

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THE FUNCTIONS OF INTERMEDIARY BEINGS

What are all these intermediary beings good for? What do the mediators mediate? In this section I will discuss four distinguishable roles that contact with intermediary beings takes in esoteric practices: the mediation of knowledge, transformation, power/agency, and authority. The first three of these are goals that practitioners themselves would recognize and even consciously intend with their practice. The final function is a crucial effect that emerges on the social level, whether consciously intended or not.

Knowledge

Much esoteric practice is concerned with achieving higher forms of knowledge (von Stuckrad, 2005). Contact with intermediary beings is one of the primary routes that practitioners take to this end. Intermediary beings may appear in revelatory visions, such as the Poimandres figure in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. But there are also techniques for manipulating the intermediary beings to bestow knowledge on the practitioner. The medieval *Ars Notoria* tradition is focused on this practice, providing a magical shortcut to proficiency in the liberal arts by petitioning the angels. Grimoires dealing with the evocation of demons also frequently list the acquisition of knowledge and secrets as something the infernal servants could help with. A prototypical example of an esoteric quest for higher knowledge through intermediary beings is once again found in John Dee. Together with his scribes (notably Edward Kelly), Dee called on the angels to give knowledge of religious and cosmic mysteries, from metaphysical insights about the constitution of the cosmos, to eschatological insights on the end of the world and the salvation of humankind. It is notable that Dee, primarily a natural philosopher and a mathematician, turned to this course of action at a point when he felt all his intellectual efforts had been exhausted (Harkness, 1999). In the ‘spiritual diaries,’ where Dee meticulously kept track of the conversations with angels, the heavenly mediators take the form of schoolteachers, giving lessons on specific topics and answering questions from the student thirsting for knowledge.

Transformation

The quest for higher knowledge often bleeds into a more soteriological goal of personal transformation. This is in line with the notion of *gnosis* as a type of knowledge that is not merely ‘higher’ in terms of its superior content, but which possesses the power to transform the knower and set her free. Thus, the contact with intermediary beings in Western esotericism is often connected with a combined goal of achieving higher knowledge and achieving *salvation* through a personal transformation brought about by this knowledge. There is an emphasis on this in the theurgic traditions emanating from neoplatonists such as Iamblichus and Proclus, and resurfacing in the neoplatonic interests of the Renaissance humanists. In later periods, the focus has been retained and reinvented in light of changing intellectual contexts, including the turn to psychological understandings of the self.

In modern occultism, the goal of personal transformation is absolutely central to ritual practice. From the Golden Dawn onwards, magical ceremonies aimed at

summoning and communicating with entities are typically understood within a broader theurgic framework where the ultimate goal is the transformation of the practitioner's self (cf. Asprem, forthcoming). In jargon stemming from the Golden Dawn and later developed in for example, the Thelemic context, this is expressed above all as achieving contact and communication with one's Higher Self, sometimes externalized into an entity known as the Holy Guardian Angel. This intermediary being is similar to the tutelary spirits of Greek antiquity, the personal *daimon* that, according to Plato, is assigned to each one of us before birth, and guides us through our earthly incarnation. Ritual practice in modern occult ritual magic is often bent on contacting this spirit directly and establishing a line of communication that will have a transformative effect on the practitioner's life.

Power/Agency

Intermediary beings may not only be the harbingers of knowledge and transformation, but may also bestow great power on the practitioner. In the class of ritual practices commonly classified as 'magic', the focus is often on having intermediary beings do things in the world for the practitioners, thus extending the magician's agency through that of the intermediary (cf. Sørensen, 2006). The evocation of demons through grimoires such as the Goetia exemplifies this: while the acquisition of knowledge may be a goal of such operations, the focus is often on having the demon perform tasks that are beneficent to the ritualist. They may also confer novel powers upon the magician, such as the power of invisibility, transportation to distant lands, or flying. In some of the occult lodges of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the power of intermediaries may also be exploited for the entire group itself, or for achieving goals that are much grander than those of an individual person. Thus, in the Ordo Templi Orientis – itself not primarily a magical group – the higher initiates are instructed to use magical techniques that involve intermediary spirits in order to strengthen the order itself and boost its mission to spread the Law of Thelema to society (cf. Asprem, forthcoming).

Authority

Intermediary beings have often played a role in the creation of new schools, currents or institutions within the occult world of modern times. This is, of course, not a new phenomenon in itself: messages from mysterious agents routinely show up in the hagiographic accounts of founders of religious movements, from Muhammed to Joseph Smith. Establishing the founder's message as authentic and special is easier if it originated with an angel of the lord or the emissary of an advanced alien civilization. Contact with intermediaries is thus often part of what Max Weber called charismatic authority.

This role of intermediaries takes a significant role in the relatively unorganized forms of esoteric practice where formalized authority structures are weak to non-existent. An example is the discourse on channelling (cf. Hanegraaff, 1996). The message of a channeler is deemed important not because it is uttered by the channel him/herself, but because it is attributed to an exotic source of higher knowledge. Access to the entity becomes crucial for claiming and retaining authority within this

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discourse. Thus, when a student of the American medium J. Z. Knight started channeling Knight's own favorite entity, the warrior Ramtha from Atlantis, this was a serious threat to her status as a unique link to higher knowledge. Consequently, Knight took appropriate legal action, resulting in Ramtha™ becoming a recognized trademark of J. Z. Knight. The ancient Atlantean spirit was now bound by copyright law, illustrating the close relationship between access to intermediary beings and the worldly authority of those who access them.

The access to intermediaries is also a recurring theme in schisms among institutionalized groups. Alice Bailey was notably ejected from the Theosophical Society after starting to receive messages directly from a hidden master, the 'Tibetan' Djwhal Khul. In the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a conflict over who the Secret Chiefs really were, whether they were real to begin with, and if so, who were still in contact with them, was at the centre of the break-up of the order and the reconstitution of new branches in the early twentieth century (cf. Howe, 1976). It was also out of these specific skirmishes that the first fully-fledged new religious movement would arise out of *fin de siècle* occultist ritual magic, namely Aleister Crowley's Thelema. The central holy text of Thelema was reportedly dictated to Crowley by a mysterious entity named Aiwass, and a host of intermediary beings, including angels, demons, pagan gods, and secret chiefs were involved at various stages in the development of its doctrines through Crowley's ongoing magical practice. Moreover, demonstrating that these communications were 'genuine' and that Aiwass was indeed more than just a hidden, higher portion of Crowley's psyche became central to establishing the authority of the Thelemic revelation (cf. Pasi, 2011). In a later generation, Thelemic and post-Thelemic positions, including Kenneth Grant's 'Typhonian' current and left-hand path positions such as Michael Aquino's Temple of Set have expanded the index of intermediary entities involved to include aliens, mythological beasts, and fiction-based entities (e.g. Evans, 2007).

TRENDS IN THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INTERMEDIARY BEINGS

Having charted some of the diversity of intermediary beings trafficked with in Western esotericism and the functions they perform, we should end this overview by looking at some trends in the historical development of these beings and their uses. Not surprisingly, the history of intermediaries is bound up with the history of Christianity, and the relative and changing power of the Churches and denominations to police orthodoxy and orthopraxy in society. One of the effects of the development and introduction of Christianity in late antiquity was that all sorts of intermediary beings that had previously flourished relatively freely were subjected to strict theological categorization and regimentation. Above all, the spirits were subsumed to a moral dualism and divided into 'good' angels of light, on the one hand, and 'evil' demons and wicked spirits, on the other. The Greek generic *daimon*, which could indeed be wicked, but equally well be neutral or even good (as the tutelary daimon, who comes closer to the notion of a 'guardian angel' as it would develop in the Christian sphere), underwent a drastic transvaluation, becoming a signifier for spirits in league with a deep ontological evil. Moreover, a theological hermeneutic of suspicion developed around this class of spirits, by which any *unknown* intermediary

(encountered in foreign cultures, among ‘pagans,’ or in the personal experiences of individuals), whatever its claimed provenance, were suspected demons in disguise. This suspicion extended ultimately to all claims of mediation, including those of angels and saints. As Paul had warned the Corinthians: ‘Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light’ (2 Cor. 11:14).

The Problem with Mediation

Thus, Christian theology introduced two aspects worthy of mention when it comes to the understanding of intermediary beings. First, a strict dichotomization of these beings into ‘good’ and ‘evil’ spirits; second, an unshakable doubt about the true nature of *all* intermediary spirits, even when claimed to be lawful. The first construction has been influential in informing distinctions between ‘white’ and ‘black’ magic, especially as appearing in the Renaissance. Cornelius Agrippa distinguished good ‘theurgia’ from bad ‘goetia’ on the grounds of the nature of the spirits involved – a distinction that was adopted by early modern demonologists such as Johann Weyer and Reginald Scot.

But the effect of the second construct is even more pervasive and historically influential. What it did was to throw all trafficking with intermediaries – except those that were sanctioned within the church (e.g. the veneration of Mary and the Saints) – into serious doubt. When someone starts receiving messages from the angels, the most economical interpretation from the orthodox perspective was to treat it not as divine favor, but demonic subterfuge. The theological problems posed by intermediaries within Christianity may in fact be considered a significant reason why contact with intermediary beings is so intimately connected with practices labeled ‘occult’ and ‘esoteric’ in the West: such actions were by definition heterodox, even when involving ‘lawful’ spirits. It is therefore not surprising that these practices have been relegated to the category of the rejected and marginal in Western culture (cf. Hanegraaff 2012).

Another important consequence of this theological problem with intermediaries is the development of specific techniques for the *discernment* of spirits (cf. Copeland and Machielsen, 2012). Experts within the Church needed to be able to distinguish genuine miracles and acts of God (whether direct interventions or through the mediation of angels or saints) from the trickery and illusions of demonic mediators. It is intriguing to note that this discourse on discernment went beyond the confines of the church and its authorities: esoteric spokespersons and practitioners of various non-liturgic techniques for interacting with intermediaries were frequently discerning as well. One excellent example from the early modern period is found in the reception history of Dee’s angel conversations. The author of the mid-seventeenth-century ‘Treatise on Angel Magic’ (referred to in the text as one Dr. Rudd) went to great pains developing a technique for filtering out deceitful entities through a series of interrogative steps (cf. Asprem 2008b). This discerning magician also appears to have concluded that Dee’s spirits were not angels at all, but rather demons in disguise: as a consequence, he altered the rituals for working with them in accordance with techniques for constraining and binding wicked spirits with holy names.

Post-Enlightenment Upheavals: Secularization, Pluralization and De-moralization

The decline in church institutions' power to police orthodoxy is one of the core meanings of 'secularization.' In this specific sense, secularization has had a revolutionizing effect on the use of intermediaries in Western religion. With the corrosion of centralized religious authority, we would expect to see a greater creativity and variety in practice and interpretation. Indeed, one of the most significant trends in discourses on intermediary beings since the Enlightenment is a tendency towards *pluralization*. Since about the middle of the nineteenth century we have seen a shift away from a dominance of Judeo-Christian intermediaries towards other forms of intermediaries that lack this grounding – such as pagan gods, mythological creatures, extraterrestrials, and entities described in fiction. The influx of 'eastern' material through the Theosophical Society has provided new resources for understanding intermediary entities as well; Theosophy proved to be a space for mixing ideas on initiates (hidden and ascended masters), aliens, and eastern concepts such as Bodhisattvas and avatars, feeding back into an emerging, post-Christian occulture. Moreover, when Judeo-Christian intermediaries *are* invoked, the range of functions to which they can be put is typically much wider than previously allowed, and the interpretations of the entities may diverge substantially from those sanctioned by established theology or canonized scripture. The understanding of 'angels' in the contemporary reconstruction of Dee's angelic magic (typically known as 'Enochian magic') is a good example of this. In modern Enochian magic, the angels are understood widely and idiosyncratically enough by practitioners to make it acceptable even for self-described Satanists to indulge in this form of 'angelic magic' (Asprem, 2012a).

Related to the trend of pluralization is a trend towards the *de-moralization* of discourses on intermediary spirits. Beings no longer understood simply in terms of 'good' versus 'evil,' but are typically viewed as parts of a continuous and complex ecology of spirits, with no intrinsic moral shades. Thus, we see in the context of Victorian occultism that the discourse on black and white magic that had been in place since the Renaissance started to crumble. New authors, starting with Samuel Liddell Mathers, Aleister Crowley, A. E. Waite, and Israel Regardie, and continuing with post-War inventors of Wicca and neopagan witchcraft, came to impose new ways of distinguishing between black and white that were not connected to the intrinsic nature of the intermediaries, but typically to the intentions of the practitioner instead.

The Problem of Disenchantment and Changes in the Explanation of Intermediaries

Max Weber argued that the thrust of monotheistic theologies is towards the disenchantment of the world, a project that has only been more or less completed with the transition from theological to natural-scientific and rationalistic interpretations of the world following the Enlightenment. Disenchantment may, however, be viewed as a change in Western plausibility structures, in which explanations of events in terms of 'mysterious, incalculable powers' become problematic, and events traditionally explained in such terms require new responses (Asprem, 2012b). Understood this way, the postulation of and interaction with intermediary beings are affected by the impending problem of disenchantment. Those

involved with such beings are prone to ask themselves: are these entities ‘really real’? How can they be effective? Where do they come from? Are they perhaps part of our psyche? If so, how is our psyche to be understood? As a subjectively real realm of imagination and experience, ultimately reducible to neurochemistry, or as a shared, intersubjectively real ‘collective unconscious’?

There are two things to say about these sorts of questions and their relation to a historical change towards disenchantment. First, they may take the form of a new sort of discernment. While in previous times it was important to discern a divine from a demonic entity, following the Enlightened age it has become important to discern between natural and supernatural causes, and thus between ‘genuine’ intermediaries and mere illusions (cf. Taves, 1999). This sort of discernment is dominant within the skeptical discourse that emerged in the wake of nineteenth-century scientific naturalism, among critics and debunkers of spiritualism, and among those dedicated to psychical research (Asprem, 2012b). It was also important for at least some of the practitioners to use this naturalistic form of discernment to argue the validity of their experiences and the entities with which they communicated (Asprem, 2008a).

The second thing to say about these questions is that they concern processes of *attribution*; that is, of how individuals explain events and experiences. If we follow the lead of recent cognitive psychology of religion (e.g. Taves, 2009), we should expect attributions to vary not only from individual to individual, but across an individual’s lifetime as well. When we look at the way modern and contemporary esoteric practitioners explain their interaction with intermediary beings – that is, what sort of reality they attribute to the entities, and how they understand them to be effective – we find a host of different answers. If we limit ourselves to discourses on ‘demons’ and ‘angels’ alone (e.g. Asprem, 2006; idem, 2012), we find that some understand these entities metaphorically, as names for subjective, psychological realities, while others express belief in their literal existence as supernatural beings. Some look to the Jungian collective unconscious, others to more naturalistic understandings of the mind/brain (cf. Asprem, 2008a). Moreover, some key spokespersons, including Aleister Crowley himself, are found to change attribution of such encounters several times over through his career (Pasi, 2011). These changing attributions are not arbitrary, but follow contexts such as the intended audience (existing followers, potential followers, outsiders, oneself) and the goal of the speech-act. In the case of Crowley and the reception of the Thelemic *Book of the Law* from the entity Aiwass, for example, we see a clear change from naturalistic, psychological, and reductionist attributions around the time of the event itself, to an increasingly supernaturalistic attribution as his investments in establishing Thelema as a valid religious alternative increase (Pasi, 2011).

What’s Next? The Intermediary Beings Population Boom in Popular Occulture

The processes of secularization, pluralisation, and de-moralization of intermediary beings have freed the discourse and practice of communicating with entities from theological policing. The effects of this have already been seen through the twentieth century, with a proliferation of new intermediaries entering the stage, and increasingly creative ways of handling them. In the twenty-first century, this creative process is increasingly powered by the interplay between individual religious experimentation

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and the mass-distribution of unusual religious representations through popular culture. As Christopher Partridge has argued (2004, 2005, 2013), we are currently witnessing the emergence of a dominant ‘occulture,’ which brings the creative efforts of previously marginal religious milieus to the attention of a vast audience. Through this process, occulture is becoming increasingly ordinary: representations belonging to the world of the occult become familiar as they are shared in a broad population (Partridge, 2013). Perhaps more than anything else, this goes for the intermediary beings that have populated the world of the occult but have tended to be marginalized from ‘elite’ culture. Angels, aliens, demons, monsters, ghosts, and spirits are making frequent appearances as characters and plot devices in a host of successful films and TV-series. The narrative grand structure of big shows like *Supernatural* and *True Blood* can even be seen to reflect this ongoing mainstreaming of occult intermediaries. At the start of *Supernatural*, we find the human protagonist ‘hunters’ chasing down a small number of supernatural entities, such as ghosts, vampires, and werewolves. As the show progresses, the protagonists find themselves in a warzone between angels and demons, with cameo appearances of increasingly bizarre entities, including pagan gods and Lovecraftian ‘Old Ones.’ Similarly, at the beginning of *True Blood*, the vampires are ‘coming out of the coffins’ and pursuing a policy of mainstreaming in human society; as the show progresses, it becomes clear that there are many more enchanted species hiding out among the humans, including shapeshifters, werewolves, maenads, witches, ghost seers – and fairies. While far from all of these beings take the function of ‘intermediaries’ in a strict sense, there can be little doubt that the scope of what sorts of non-human entities can be imagined, theorized, and become the subjects of creative appropriation by religious bricoleurs, is increasing through the mass-distribution of popular occulture. Moreover, the ordinaryness of occulture does not rely on viewers passively adopting content spread through these shows. Instead, we are expecting a creative interplay between the shared representations and meanings explored in the shows, and the creative input and uses on the receiving end. Popular occulture can thus become an arena for learning and socializing into more formal occultural practices (cf. Dyrendal, 2008). That *Supernatural* can do this in an effective way for ritual practices concerned with the summoning and interaction with demons and angels is not in doubt: The show draws heavily, and quite reliably, on esoteric lore and ritual techniques connected with the manipulation of different categories of intermediary entities; for example, Enochian language is used to command angels, while Latin does just fine for exorcising demons. Ghosts, on their part, retain the vernacular. Given the spread of this and similar shows, the twenty-first-century angel summoner is likely to start his or her occult learning process during Thursday night’s TV entertainment rather than crouching over arcane books in a library.

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