

Paul Kléber Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013. Pp. 430. \$45. ISBN 9780300123586.

John V. Fleming, *The Dark Side of the Enlightenment: Wizards, Alchemists, and Spiritual Seekers in the Age of Enlightenment*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013. \$27.95. Pp. 414. ISBN 9780393079463.

Big books on eighteenth-century developments in science, politics, philosophy, religion and the creative imagination abound. Porter's *Enlightenment* (2000), Uglow's *The Lunar Men* (2002), Holmes's *The Age of Wonder* (2008) and Pagden's *The Enlightenment and Why it Still Matters* (2013) are just a few notable twenty-first century examples. With *Solomon's Secret Arts* and *The Dark Side of the Enlightenment*, Paul Kléber Monod and John V. Fleming have published two studies on eighteenth-century occulture – to borrow Christopher Partridge's term – that in their scope and mode of presentation resemble some of the books mentioned above. Monod's and Fleming's scholarship offers students and scholars of the eighteenth century an opportunity to rethink and re-evaluate their understanding of 'the Age of Reason,' as it was popularised by Nicolson in his monumental study of 1960. While Nicolson argued that the Enlightenment had 'destroy[ed] the belief in the supernatural' (290), Monod's and Fleming's books chronicle and foreground the persistent presence of alchemical, magical and mystical discourses in eighteenth-century science, religion and philosophy. As such, these books can help students of the Enlightenment to develop a balanced understanding of the eighteenth-century intellectual environment; one in which the concepts of reason and imagination, religion and science, nature and the supernatural are equally weighed.

Monod's book is 'a study of texts and how they were used' (8). As a history of occult writings it is fundamentally a work of intellectual history. Monod commendably contextualizes his intellectual history in social, economic and political contexts. By drawing engaging and nuanced portraits of the life and thought of important historical figures such as Elias Ashmole, Thomas Vaughan and William Yworth, amongst others, Monod convincingly illustrates that in the late seventeenth century science and the occult were 'not at war with one another' (16). He defines 'the period 1650-1688' as 'an alchemical heyday' (29) and shows how important print culture was in disseminating occult learning. In the second part, Monod explains that the marginalisation of occult thinking in the early eighteenth century was not just an effect of scientific developments and the waning of belief in the supernatural. He shows that the occult was also marginalised by a changing political, social and economic climate. Moreover, as sales of occult literature dwindled and the practice of astrology and alchemy was increasingly commercialised, the occult was bereft of intellectual respectability. As a consequence, 'the Newtonian Magi' (166) remained quiet about their serious interests in alchemy and astrology. Part Three, which will be of direct interest to students of British Romanticism, concerns the occult revival in the second half of the eighteenth century. In this section Monod again emphasizes the significant role that commercial publishers played in keeping alive and fostering the spread of seventeenth-century occult writings. He also shows how the occult, now ousted from scientific discourse, found a new home in imaginative literature via the culture of sensibility, the gothic revival and the stage. While this point may be familiar to scholars of Gothic and Romantic literature, Monod brings important new material to light from which literary scholars can develop new insights. The sections on the mystical contexts of the late eighteenth-century occult revival, the portrait of the astrologer Sibly and the story of the alchemist Bacstrom's 'beautiful dream of knowledge, riches and

power' (287) will enhance any student's knowledge and understanding of eighteenth-century occulture in relation to Romantic and enlightenment discourse.

In 'a brief word to the reader' Fleming explains that his book 'is intended for the educated general reader rather than the specialist' (xiii). I believe, however, that scholars working in the fields of eighteenth-century intellectual history, Romanticism, or the Gothic, will find much in *The Dark Side of the Enlightenment* that will further enhance their understanding of eighteenth-century occulture. Like Monod, Fleming points out that the interest in alchemy, astrology, and 'magic' was far from marginal in the period. For a time it was actually in vogue with the cultural elite. Fleming's great expertise in medieval English literature and religious thought allows him to develop fresh and valuable new insights on the occult enlightenment that complement Monod's work. He is able to show that 'there are numerous aspects of the intellectual life of the Enlightenment in which the medieval continuities are as conspicuous as the medieval rejections' (9). Where Monod's study seems more directly concerned with the relation between the occult and the rational enlightenment, Fleming focusses specifically on the occult's relation to 'traditional' religious discourse and eighteenth-century spirituality.

Monod's study is structured as a flowing historical narrative. He pinpoints a hey-day, a period of demise, and subsequent revival of occult learning. Fleming's book is organised around case studies of 'occult' movements such as the Convulsionists and Freemasons, and personalities such as Cagliostro and Julie de Krüdener. He begins his exploration of the dark side of the enlightenment by exploring the career of the mid-seventeenth-century 'healer' Valentine Greatrakes, whose miracle cures brought him from provincial Ireland to the centre of British intellectual and scientific society. Greatrakes became the subject of discussion 'in the London coffeehouses' (55) and a pamphlet war between adherents of the 'old' and 'new' science. This chapter, like Monod's sections on Ashmole and Vaughan, shows the extent to which occult thinking was part of, and brought together, seventeenth-century scientific, medical and religious discourse. Fleming specifically foregrounds the idea that in the long eighteenth century 'the mainstream of European thought was not materialist but *sacramental*. In the sacramental view, the material and visible world paralleled another that was immaterial and invisible' (112). This quotation highlights a difference between Monod's and Fleming's approaches to eighteenth-century occulture. Monod's book focuses on the British Enlightenment; Fleming's study is European in scope, like Nicolson's *Age of Reason*, and covers international phenomena such as The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross in more detail.

With their portraits of Cagliostro, Monod and Fleming continue a tradition instigated by Nicolson, you could say. While Nicolson seemed to revel in the gullibility of the European courts and the demise and punishment of its favourite magician, Monod is more astute in explaining Cagliostro's temporary success in commercial terms: 'Cagliostro was essentially marketing an old product under an exciting new label' (296). His explanation of the Count's demise is also more convincing. According to Monod, he was a colourful and public individual who simply could not identify himself in a society in which 'proper social identification' (298) was increasingly important. Naturally Cagliostro's person and actions became suspect. Fleming also treats Cagliostro in some detail. He seems more sympathetic towards the occult philosopher's learning and plight. He investigates not only the life and legend of the historical Giuseppe Balsamo, but also the reliability of the sources on which the many stories have been based. Fleming does not treat Cagliostro as an impostor or deluded seeker, but as a figure on the margins of the enlightenment who sought to re-introduce a very old intellectual tradition into his world: 'the so-called Egyptian rite' (236). Fleming explores Cagliostro's fame in the context of late-eighteenth-century 'Egyptomania' (236). In this intellectual context his identity as 'enlightened wizard' (252) is more plausible, even if it remains part of a 'magical' subculture, and ultimately fantastic.

Monod's and Fleming's different approaches to the occult enlightenment, as well as their different focus points, have resulted in two wide-ranging, erudite and engaging studies that truly complement each other. They will be of great value to any student of eighteenth-century intellectual and cultural history and should find their place alongside major studies of the 'age of reason' in personal and institutional libraries.

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