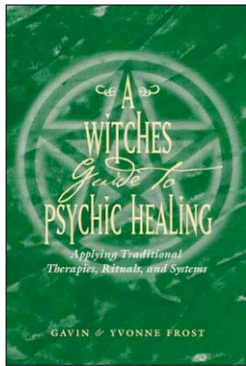


## Book Reviews

### **A Witch's Guide to Psychic Healing: Applying Traditional Therapies, Rituals, and Systems,** Gavin & Yvonne Frost

(Red Wheel/Weiser, 2003, 256pp, \$18.95)

Review by Ron Adams



Remembering the smell of lavender on a spring day, or the taste of lemon, the feel of olive oil on the skin during a massage. These are some of the things I remembered reading this book.

An excellent, eclectic book of Healing modalities. This book is written by two Wiccans, Gavin and Yvonne. Though, as they say in their introduction, 'this is an ecumenical book.' No matter what background you come from, Christian, Agnostic, New Age, Wiccan, Atheist, Buddhist, Native American Indian, Shaman this book has a wide variety of healing techniques and approaches.

I use to meditate a lot when I was younger. After reading this book, I have gotten back into the habit. In fact I had an amazing mediation just before writing this review.

It is wonderful how spirit guides and just regular people you know in your life can impart special messages for you, on your life path, when the time is right. And if we attune to it, and listen, we get the messages we need, when we are ripe to receive them.

Yvonne and Gavin share their Epiphanies that occurred in 1972, from an odd source, a tax record that dated back to 1829 or earlier, from the house they were restoring. It was just time for the message to be received.

This book covers psychosomatic medicine, scientific approaches, the history of well-known healers like Sainte Bernadette, Edgar Cayce, Depak Chopra, Dr. Andrew Weil, and not so well known healers like Harold Plume. From Psychic healing, laying on of hands, Reiki, to aroma therapy and healing with sounds and colors; this book has just about everything.

I think you will enjoy it. I remembered a great many things from the past, and learned some new things too, and gained new insight from the ideas being presented in their own particular way, in this intriguing book.

As if that weren't enough, it goes into soul retrieval psychiatry and depression, health, nutrition and exercises. It even has some workbook pages where you can explore some things for yourself, like beginning a healing journal.

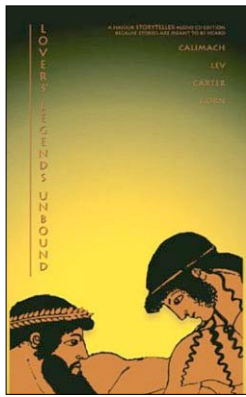
RB

Pendulum charts, etheric levels, using tarot cards for diagnosis, healing stories from Wiccans and distance healings. Give it a try. This book might be an eye opener for today's kitchen witch and internet magickian.

**Lovers' Legends Unbound**, Andrew Calimach

(Haiduk Press, 2004, 87pp + Audio-CD)

Reviewed by Joseph Gelfer



Lovers' Legends Unbound is a companion edition to Calimach's previous book, Lovers' Legends: The Gay Greek Myths. In that volume Calimach revisited well-known characters from Greek myth and uncovered previously ignored aspects of same-sex love and its influence on Greek social, moral and spiritual teachings. These myths, 'by turn heroic, cautionary or shamanic, always maintain the dignified cadence of ancient epic, ...that self-indulgence, betrayal, and violence are to be despised, and that love is the highest good.'

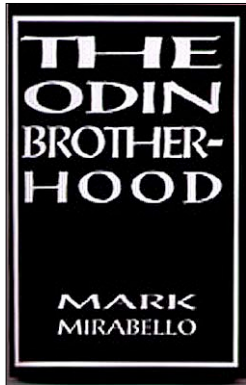
Calimach draws upon these myths for Lovers' Legends Unbound which is accompanied by an audio CD read by actor Timothy Carter and punctuated with occasional flute by Steve Gorn. There are nine tales including new insights into male love not just from the expected such as Narcissus but the mighty Zeus and Hercules. There is even a glimpse into the gay side of the Trojan War with Achilles and Patroclus.

The audio CD provides a useful route into the spirit of the stories which would originally have been spoken rather than read. There is strength in the silence between the words which stands out to the modern ear, more used to fast-cuts and sound effects. Steve Gorn's flute is used sparingly and helps produce an atmosphere all the more evocative. Sometimes more interesting than the myths themselves is how we have become unaccustomed to listening to stories in this way, of the attention required to accurately understand the spoken word without supporting devices. It is a rewarding exercise to listen deeply and to experience the odd calm that it brings.

Lovers' Legends Unbound is an interesting read and a more interesting listen. Calimach's rediscovery of the gay elements to Greek myth is useful for the casual reader and as an instructional tool for gender and classical studies.



**The Odin Brotherhood**, Mark L. Mirabello  
(Mandrake of Oxford, 2004, 128pp., £10.99/\$20.00)



“When the world is pregnant with lies, a secret long hidden will be revealed.” An Odinst Prophecy

Just like *The Cannibal Within*, a chance encounter in the Atlantis bookshop blossomed into a dialogue between the author and the anonymous adept of Odin. Called an “occult religion” for adepts, a “creed of iron” for warriors, and a “secret society” for higher men and women who value “knowledge, freedom and power,” the Odin Brotherhood honors the gods and goddesses of the Norse pantheon. This non-fiction book details the legends, the rituals, and the mysteries of an ancient and enigmatic movement.

Mirabello is also the author of *The Cannibal Within* and *The Crimes of Jehovah*. Professor Mark L. Mirabello lectures on Intellectual History, the History of Medicine, and Alternative Religions and Cults at Shawnee State University in the USA. Formerly a visiting Professor at Nizhni Novgorod State University in Russia, he has a Ph.D. from the University of Glasgow.

**The Concrete Sky**, Marshall Moore  
(Harrington Park Press, 2003, 273pp, \$19.95)



Drunk and partying, *Concrete Sky*'s protagonist, Chad Sobran falls off a balcony. His homophobic brother, Martin, successfully convinces the responding EMT's and emergency room doctors that Chad is a danger to himself and that the fall was actually a failed suicide attempt. As the story develops, we learn that Martin has cultivated an obsessive and progressively more violent obsessions with Chad and Chad's homosexuality. When Chad awakes he discovers he's been placed in the hospital's psychiatric unit for 72 hours of observation.

While staying in the psyche unit, Chad meets the young and enigmatic Jonathan Fairbanks, a fellow patient. Jonathan witness (and survived) the murder suicide of his wealthy parents. He's in the unit suffering from post-traumatic stress relating to the



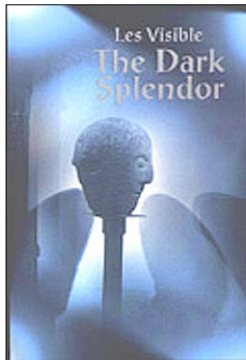
incident. The two quickly connect and develop a relationship. It turns out that the police are still investigating Jonathan's parents murder and consider him a possible suspect.

Other murders at the hospital soon follow and suspicion again turns toward Jonathan. As Chad and Jonathan's relationship begins to develop suspicion heightens as another patient mysteriously falls to her death in the elevator shaft. The two's relationship quickly becomes a psychological odyssey on a roller coaster ride of mystery. The story increases in intensity as the author adeptly navigates the quick turns of his plot.

Mr. Moore successfully avoids the pitfalls that fell many a first time novelist. His plot displays an inventiveness that lifts it out of the genre that it will, no doubt, inevitably be placed. Moore's prose is sharp and his story riveting. My only complaint that I have to wait for his next book.

### **The Dark Splendour, Les Visible**

(Mandrake of Oxford, 2004, 284pp., £9.99/\$18.00)



'Billy Joe thought of himself as beyond the restrictions of the common herd. He was free to do his own will as no other was, above limits and laws, past apprehension, un-reachable, untouchable, an entity unto himself alone. This is what he thought. But this is not what he was. Everything he did served the will and the interests of a force far older and deeper than he would ever reach. In comparison, he was like a child playing with blocks. He served a master who was loyal to no one, just as he was loyal to no one. There were many men like Billy Joe in the world, less accomplished in their evil, but moving deliberately down that ancient staircase into the Dark Splendor.'

One part crime novel and one part occult thriller, *The Dark Splendor* takes us behind the veil of appearances into a world where nothing is what it seems. Set against the backdrop of the island of Maui, the pacing grips us from the first page and sends us at a gallop on a white-knuckled ride featuring serial killers, drug dealers, horrific murder, martial artists, reincarnation, ceremonial magic, a black magician and an immortal Tibetan Master. For pure enjoyment and surprise this book is guaranteed to remain in your thoughts long after you have finished reading.

Les Visible is a writer and recording artist. He has had a lifelong love affair with the Hermetic Sciences and the Martial Arts. He is a seasoned traveler in psychedelic realms and prefers the Devic Kingdom over the suffocating confinements of the Sub-



Matrix. Along the way he has matriculated from the military to prisons and the maximum security wards for the criminally insane. A collection of his works in various media can be found at [www.lesvisible.com](http://www.lesvisible.com). He lives somewhere in Europe with his wife Susanne and his memories.

**The Unknown God: W. T. Smith And The Thelemites**, Martin P. Starr  
(Teitan Press, 2004, 432pp + over 44 photographs and illustrations, \$49.95)  
Reviewed by MMM  
Courtesy of *Mandrake Speaks* ([mandake-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:mandake-subscribe@yahoogroups.com))



That's got to be one of the most interesting books on magical history I've read in a long while, perhaps ever. Martin Starr debut book is a documentary study of the North American followers of the English mystic Aleister Crowley told through the life of their defacto leader, Wilfred Talbot Smith (1885-1957). The author is fairly well known as one of the owners of Teitan Press, who for many years have produced fine, authoritative editions of the master's more obscure works: books like the beautiful facsimile of *Konx Om Pax*; the pornographic classic, *Snowdrops from a Curate's garden* (of which I'm told there are many) and Crowley pastiche of Sufi sexual mysticism *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz*.

Starr tells the story of Wilfred Smith's and I suppose what one might call the second generation of Thelemites who set about to promulgate the Crowleyan teachings in 1930s Hollywood. Perhaps the following quotation from the books terminus ad quem, might give some idea of the ups and down of the Thelemic movement:

'With Germer expired the last chance for Thelema to take root in the United States, and the projects internationally were no more bright. Or so one might have thought. Germer had successfully accused Mellinger of being an FBI agent and kicked him out of the house, expelled Grant for blasphemy, dismissed McMurtry as a slave to his wife and ceased corresponding with Metzger over differences in the Crowley translations in German the latter had published. Motta had fled the United States for his native Brazil after having been arrested in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in February 1961 on suspicion of drug trafficking; while in jail he confessed that the source of the drugs found in his compartment was none other than his OTO Brother, Louis T. Culling. In the following year Germer refrained from giving Motta a charter to open the OTO in Brazil,

☞

mindful of the fact that Motta, in his experience only “switched temporarily back into sanity.” Yet on his deathbed what faith Germer had in a future for Thelema he chose to vest in Motta, telling Sasha to inform Frater Adjuvo that he was “The Follower.” What this may have meant was the subject of speculation that was never satisfactorily resolved. The issue of Germer’s heir to the headship of the OTO remained an open question to the few who knew or cared about it.’ (Starr 2004: 343)

For those perhaps less familiar with some of the above names let me tell you that were talking about all the main players in the subsequent history of Thelema - here laid low by the mind games of Crowley and his successor Germer. And that’s not counting the ones that had already expired in scene two - i.e. Crowley’s co-superior in the OTO Frater Achad, Jack Parsons and the books hero Wilfred Smith. It reminded me of the first act of the *Mahabharata* when Vatsyanana tells the audience that the character who represents the ancestor of all humanity is at that point rendered permanently barren - what can possibly happen next??

Well that’s would take another book, but its seems to me that the modern stop go progress of Thelema is in part made more comprehensible by reading this fascinating history of its first days. In a way it really is act two of the same play. When Crowley had trouble with his frater superior Theodor Reuss he upped and gave him the sack proclaiming himself head of the order (Starr 2004: 112.) It was a tradition he was to recommend to others with the words of John Bunyan: ‘my sword to him that can take it’. And indeed, according to this book, if Crowley could have proved his right to the OTO crown he might also have succeeded in imposed his control over the Theosophical Society and AMORC - and then how differently the magical world of the 80s might have looked. I could go on but hopefully that’s more than enough to wet your appetite for this highly recommended masterpiece.

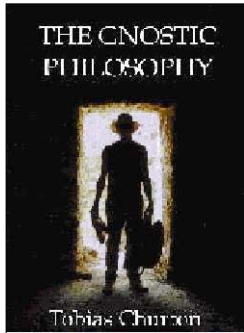


**The Gnostic Philosophy**, Tobias Churton

(Signal Publishing, 2004)

Reviewed by Paul Newman

Courtesy of *Mandrake Speaks* ([mandake-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:mandake-subscribe@yahoogroups.com))



Readers may remember Tobias Churton's 80's Channel 4 series *The Gnostics*, which I certainly enjoyed, and his follow up book *The Gnostics* (Wiedenfield & Nicholson, 1987; US Barnes & Noble, 1997). It was thus with some pleasure I embarked on a review of this book, a pleasure which soon evaporated on being faced with a book where the meaning of the phrase *Gnostic Philosophy* is barely discernable.

What do we mean by *Gnostic*? Historically the word has described an elite group of Christians, who believed themselves possessed of a knowledge (*gnosis*) and which made its adherents believe themselves above the restricted understanding and petty morality of their peers and especially other Christians. In its day, Gnosticism was a vibrant philosophy, fully able to engage with its peers. Its practitioners were able to argue their case cogently not only from an intellectual standpoint but also from a perspective imbued with a spiritual experience which led them to find themselves possessed of an insight denied other men. It is this experience, rather than the intellectual position, which defines the *Gnosis*. It is true that the word Gnostic now refers to a wider spectrum of groups than simply Christian Gnostics, but I had been hoping that it was continuity of spiritual practice that was to be examined in the book, and which might have justified the title Gnostic Philosophy. Instead, Tobias Churton seems to take the view that any underground, counter establishment group, which allows its participants to believe they have a secret or forbidden knowledge is to be called Gnostic. This allows almost any esoteric group to be included and this book is a potted history of most of them: Templars, Cathars, Freemasons, Rosicrucians, and more - all the usual suspects are there.

The book starts promisingly enough with a review of Zoroastrian cosmological theory, and especially the nature of time. It then reviews rapidly Jewish speculative theology in the late Hellenistic period before embarking on a review of Gnostic thinking as it emerges in the early Christian period. There is an awful lot of interesting material to be covered in this subject but the book attempts to cover so much ground that most of the material is covered only superficially, and a great deal follows the authors' personal prejudices. Why this should be so, I cannot imagine. The list of advisors to the book reads like a Who's Who of contemporary Gnostic research (and the transcripts of



interviews with them are an attractive feature of the book). The main points of Gnostic thinking (as we think we understand them) are given but surely they deserve more than bullet point treatment. We are given the almost obligatory quotations from the Nag Hammadi corpus but, now the enormous theological implications of these texts has sunk in, it must be time to seriously question the extent to which they represent uniquely Gnostic thinking. Whilst striking in the foreignness of their theology from contemporary Christian teaching, there is actually little which seems to be purely Gnostic in outlook, some is even pagan. Are these then documents representative of Gnostic teaching or of a Christianity once normative (called by Gnostics *psychic*) but now lost to us? Also, material from ancient authors is given, but so much is missed out. For example, there is a lot of extant material covering the radically different interpretations Gnostics put on the Pauline Epistles. Absence of any discussion of this material is surprising, not the least for being the subject of a whole book on the subject by Elaine Pagels (for whom the author shows only the highest regard), but which is not even referenced. This would have allowed readers to assess Gnostic thinking in terms of passages with which they may be presumed to be familiar.

My reservations notwithstanding, this section is, in my opinion, the most successful of the book. The material given is generally accurate and a coherent account is maintained providing a wide, if personal, account of Gnostic thinking up to Late Antiquity.

The book then skips merrily through the centuries with reviews of Sufis, Qabalistic Magic, the Troubadors, the Knights Templar, Jacob Boehme, Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, and a final part on 20<sup>th</sup> Century magical thinking. Can so much be encompassed in 379 pages of text? Sadly, in my opinion, the answer is no. Each chapter attempts a pen sketch of its subject, but really, too little information is given to make any chapter wholly satisfactory. Reviewing this, I asked myself: for whom is the book intended? You might think it addressed to intelligent laypersons interested seeking an overview of the material, but no single chapter adequately covers its subject matter. This struck me most in the chapter on the Troubadors, about which I know the least. I found after reading it, I did not really understand the Troubadors any better. Indeed, the impression I got was more of an essay designed to impress a university examiner than an introduction to the subject. In other words, if you already know the subject matter these essays may, perhaps, give an interesting slant on known material.

Aleister Crowley merits a whole (long) chapter and the author gives a very positive account of his life and philosophy. He is at pains to point out: Aleister Crowley has something important to say to all of us. I feel sure Mandrake readers will echo this sentiment, but, will they enjoy the attempt to write a life history of the Beast in 47 pages?



I leave it to readers to come to their own conclusion. The rather fulsome tribute paid to A.C. may explain the rather perfunctory sketch of Jung's life and thoughts, perhaps an attempt to keep a long book to reasonable lengths. A strange omission, though, given Jung's vastly more influential work and his interest and important insights offered into Gnostic thinking.

If I have dwelt thus far on what I believe are the less desirable aspects of this book, it is not without merit. More positively, some of the topics discussed in the book have been the subject of a considerable number of recent speculative books. This book is actually free of such speculation, indeed it is quite sober in its approach, and the material presented is generally trustworthy. It represents a genuine antidote to the unfettered speculation so rampant nowadays.

I wish I could say the same about Chapter 9: Gnosis and the New Physics. A lot has been written about supposed parallels between some aspects of modern physics and mystical experience, a great deal of it drivel. Unfortunately this book manages to reproduce most of the same material found in countless New Age books on Spirituality and the New Physics. For example, early on in the chapter Churton states that in 1904 "Einstein published his General Theory of Relativity". He didn't, it was the Special Theory published then. The General Theory came later in 1916. He goes on "he proved mathematically that space and time were relative, not absolute conditions of the universe. Relative, that is, to the speed at which the observer or observing apparatus was traveling". This really misses the point. It is true that Relativity theory shows that as components spatial and temporal coordinates vary, but Einstein was properly pleased to discover that the space-time interval (now properly recognized as the fundamental scenario of physical reality) is invariant under transformation, i.e. an Absolute of the theory! Einstein had wanted to call his theory The Theory of Absolutes but was dissuaded from doing so by his friend Minkowski. Think how different history would have been if Einstein had gone with his original intention. The facts of the situation are widely available and, considering the book purports to be an intelligent and articulate presentation of deep questions, I find the fact that the author reproduces such half baked ideas repugnant. The next paragraph is really excruciating and the rest of the chapter doesn't do much better. It would be impossible to identify any more misconceptions for this review, there are so many. Frankly, given the poor grasp of the subject shown by the author, the book would be much better for the omission of this chapter.

In conclusion, I would say that, with such a large selection of material, it would be surprising if a reader did not learn something new. The main influences on the book are scholarly, and I welcome this as a genuine alternative to much speculative writing currently published. However, since the book fails as a first introduction to the subject

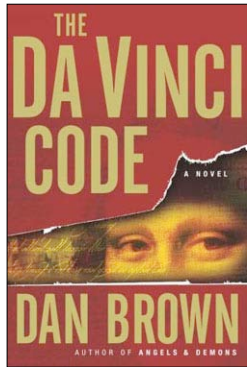


and is inadequate for use as a reference text, I would recommend borrowing it, rather than buying.

**The Davinci Code, Dan Brown**

(Doubleday, 2003, 454pp.)

Reviewed by Ron Adams



This book has been on the New York Times Best Sellers list for some time now. And I have heard internet rumors of it being made into a movie. This would make a great movie, especially if the rumors of Ron Howard producing it are true.

Imagine you are an art historian who has just come out with a book on the Goddess connection in religious art. Then suddenly, that night, after your lecture in Paris, you are in bed and awakened because the Paris police wish to question you.

From there the book unfolds into a wild who-done-it story. Seems a famous art person is dead in the Louve, and our main character is under suspicion. What follows is an unfolding story about Davinci, secret codes and the Priory of Zion, the Knights Templars. Not since *The Eight* by Katherine Neville and *Celestine Prophecy*, by James Redfield, has a book combined mystery and adventure, that is interesting and exciting.

Suddenly we are on a chase to find the Holy Grail. And if you think you know what the Holy Gail is, get ready for a Historical Revisioning.

I won't spoil it for you. One thing I will expand upon, that is only briefly touched upon in the book, then dropped, is about the Renaissance Man himself, Leonardo Davinci. This concerns his famous painting, Mona Lisa.

What if Mona Lisa is a picture of Leonardo in drag? What if Leonardo is really Leonara?

Was the genius of the Renaissance really a woman? Information like this could turn the world upside down.

This is the kind of fun you could have ready *The Davinci Code*.



**Thelemic Handbook: A practical guide to the works of Aleister Crowley,**

Melusine Draco (Ignotus Press, 2003, £9.99)

Reviewed by Vlad Kiosk

Courtesy of *Mandrake Speaks* ([mandake-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:mandake-subscribe@yahoogroups.com))

To criticize a small press like Ignotus for the poor quality of their proof reading would be churlish, however this particular book would have been well served by more rigorous editing. Originally published as a booklet in 1997, and revised and expanded for this edition, there is a significant amount of unnecessary and extraneous material that obscures the author's novel approach to the life and works of AC. If all the derogatory comments regarding less enlightened commentators on the man were cut away, along with the padding provided by descriptions of all the major arcana of the Thoth tarot deck, the remainder would make a rather punchy article. Indeed, these days, I think it would make a worthwhile few web pages. As a book, even a slim one of a hundred pages, it doesn't really stand well.

The core idea of the book is essentially a Crowley reading list, but it is an intriguing one, and I believe a valid approach to the subject matter. The tone verges a little into the preachy at points, and there is some unintentional mystification when technical terms are mentioned without explanation. The latter is a common problem when writing about Uncle Al of course, and one that he himself could be guilty of. To some extent, this book gives the impression that it was crafted for people who feel that they ought to read Crowley, and thus it falls between two stools. It is not useful in terms of detail, such as Lon Milo Duquette's *Magick of Aleister Crowley*, nor does it inspire, such as *Abrahadabra* by Rodney Orpheus, or, indeed, the works of AC himself.

**Dedalus Book of the Occult, Gary Lachman**

(Dedalus Ltd., 2003, 324pp.)

Reviewed by Mogg Morgan

Courtesy of *Mandrake Speaks* ([mandake-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:mandake-subscribe@yahoogroups.com))

Gary Lachman aka Gary Valentine formerly of 80s band, *Blondie*, has written four books in as many years, including *Turn off Your Mind: the dark side of the age of aquarius*, *Secret History of Consciousness*, *New York Rocker* and now this 380 odd page study of occult thought. Crowley's masterwork, *Liber ABA: Magick*, provides what is probably one of the most interesting reading lists of any occult course. Strangely this list is omitted from the new Weiser 'blue brick', which is yet another reason to search out the Symonds



& Grant edition (appendix 1 p306sq). All occult life from Bhagavad Gita to Zanon is there. Professor Ronald Hutton has even praised it as a pemmican of humanist education. In many ways Gary's book is a useful companion to that reading list, filling in many fascinating biographical details and giving a taste of what joys to expect. At the end is a short sampler of the work discussed, with extracts from Blavatsky and even Crowley himself. It has to be said that Lachman's work doesn't move much past the 1930s, there is pretty much nothing from occultists after Crowley, nothing from Kenneth Grant or Gerald Gardner, no Charge of the Goddess or Marilyn Manson. In his defense Gary writes that it isn't intended as a history of the occult or occultism, but a study of writers and poets influenced by the occult. Perhaps its too early for that although I suspect the author's has a slight bias towards the American view of occult history. Apart from the absence of either index or contents page, this is an excellent, indispensable book and well worth the extremely modest price of 10 pounds.

