



## LEVERHULME LECTURES

Reinventing the Renaissance Research Centre Programme

### **PROFESSOR GYÖRGY E. SZŐNYI**

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6 May, 2009, 17:30, David 016 Lecture Theatre, Anglia Ruskin University,  
Cambridge

### **Exaltation and Power: The Historiography of Renaissance Magic**

Since the birth of philological scholarship in the Renaissance, authors interested in the esoteric sciences felt compelled to write encyclopedic or introductory handbooks, presenting the occult arcana, essentially meant only for “the selected few”, to the general public. The first such writer was Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535) who published his vast *De Occulta Philosophia* (written about 1510, published in 1533).

Even until recently, long after the scientific revolution, many authors of such popularizing introductions to occult philosophy and magic were themselves believers and practitioners. From the late nineteenth century, however, the number of “histories of magic” written from the platforms of anthropology or cultural history have also increased. In English, much used and still solid compendia are Lynn Thorndike’s monumental *History of Magic and Experimental Sciences* (8 vols, 1923-58) or Kurt Seligman’s more concise *Magic, Supernaturalism and Religion* (1948). Nowadays, when the historical study of Western Esoterism has become a master’s degree programme at several European universities (Amsterdam, Exeter, Paris), it is no wonder that there is a need for more books of this type which take a fresh look at both well and less known facts and which make use of up-to-date methodologies.

The lecture looks at some of the main features of early modern magical ideas and practices and their scholarly interpretations since the beginning of the twentieth century.

10 June, 2009, 17:30, David 016 Lecture Theatre, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge

## **The Lure of the Occult: Renaissance Magic in Modern Cultural Representations**

The lure of esotericism and occultism is clearly present in our postmodern culture. The most visible forms of this attraction in our time – apart from horoscopes in tabloid newspapers – are novels and feature films spanning both “high art” and various forms of popular culture. In this talk I am not going to deal with film or with cheap “airport paperbacks”, although their examination would certainly touch upon an important aspect of the sociology of late modern civilization. My aim is primarily to draw attention to how mainstream literary fiction throughout the twentieth century has delighted in recycling occult and esoteric themes. In this genre we mostly find (pseudo) historical (meta)fictions which tend to locate their plot and heroes in the time of the Renaissance. One should not be surprised by this, since the period which has been credited with “the birth of the individual” was also “the Age of the Great Magi.”

The lecture looks at some English, German, Hungarian and Italian novels which recycle occult and esoteric themes and tries to answer the question: “How can we, if at all, explain the lure of the occult and the esoteric in our postmodern, industrialized world?”

*Each lecture will be followed by a small reception with refreshments*

**For further information visit:  
[www.anglia.ac.uk/renaissance](http://www.anglia.ac.uk/renaissance)**

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