

Hybrid Masculinity and the H. B. of L.: Practical and “Progressive” Occultism in Late-Victorian Northeast Scotland*

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Abstract

Occultism in late-Victorian Britain was a manly endeavour, the feminisation of its discourse and structures not occurring until after 1900. Organisations were modelled on gentlemen’s clubs and promoted a masculine ideal based on erudition, honour, willpower and rationality. Yet this ideal was contradictory and unstable. A strong association existed in the public mind between psychic receptiveness and feminine passivity; this, combined with perceptions of the (male) scholar as effete and reclusive, the era’s turbulent gender politics, and esotericism’s heterodox beliefs, all served to undermine occult manhood. This paper argues that its hegemony was buttressed by the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor (H. B. of L.), a short-lived yet influential organisation of sex magic, co-founded in 1884 in Northeast Scotland by Peter Davidson. Utilising the approaches of microhistory and biography and drawing on the concepts of “cultural circuits,” “hegemonic masculinity” and “hybridisation,” it asserts that the Brotherhood reconfigured occult masculinity as practical and progressive by co-opting aspects from scientific manhood and feminist campaigns. Ultimately, however, it failed to fundamentally challenge hierarchies of gender, class, race, and sexuality and instead constitutes an example of “hybrid masculinity,” whereby superficial accommodations ensure the hegemonic ideal’s continued dominance. While this new model of manhood endured, the H. B. of L. collapsed in 1886, a result not of its transgressive teachings but the exposure of its secretary’s prior conviction for fraud. While sexual deviance was tacitly permitted in the occult networks of the fin-de-siècle, criminality and its working-class associations were not.

Keywords: Practical occultism; hybrid masculinity; sex magic; Scotland; science; Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor

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In April 1884, Peter Davidson (1837–1915), resident of the parish of Alves in Northeast Scotland, inland revenue officer, husband, father, fiddler, vegetarian and occultist, was called upon to defend his masculinity in the local press. A controversy had been raging for weeks in the letters’ pages of the *Elgin Courant and Courier* over the publication of his pamphlet, “The Divine Church.”¹ The fifty-page work, subtitled “A Death Blow to Human Churches,” drew on theosophical sources and claimed to contain “the essence and groundwork of all religions, and the only and real method by which it is possible for man to attain happiness and immortality.”² A number of correspondents, drawn from the region’s predominantly Presbyterian population, lined up to denounce it. “J. R.” thought it “worse than trash . . . the essence of error” and written “in very bad taste,” while “Heldon” challenged the author to prove to any scientific or well-informed man “the *truth* of any of the theories announced in his book.”³ “Anglo-Indian’s” attack was more personal. Already aware of Davidson as a local inhabitant with aspirations to “go out to India to sit at the feet of a genii, if he could find a convenient place for the cultivation of greens,” he derided him as an immoral, uncultured and superstitious “jogee” or mystic, declaring the “extravagant and abusive” language with which he had defended his work during the debate stamped “the character of the man.”⁴

Davidson was nonplussed. While his detractors expressed confidence that the episode had surely alienated him from any “little local following” he may have had, Davidson assured readers that the parish’s opinion of his morals and sanity remained undiminished, with one of his supporters, “Justitia,” claiming

1. Davidson’s pamphlet was first reviewed for the local press in the *Northern Chronicle and General Advertiser for the North of Scotland*, the writer of “Literary Notes” declaiming wryly that “A death-blow to human churches’ has come out of Banchory” (16 January 1884). Numerous “letters to the editor” were then published in the *Elgin Courant and Courier* between 21 March and 29 April 1884, with critical opinion on the text, Davidson’s character and theosophy in general robustly countered by its author and one supporter, “Justitia” (his detractors inferring that this too was Davidson writing under a pseudonym).

2. Davidson, *Man Know Thyself: The Divine Church*, title page.

3. Letter from “J. R.,” “A Questionable Book,” *Elgin Courant*, 21 March 1884; letter from “Heldon,” “The Divine Church,” 21 March 1884.

4. Letters from “Anglo-Indian,” *Elgin Courant*, 11 April 1884, 18 April 1884 and 29 April 1884.

to have “seen and read the very highest opinions” on the pamphlet “not only from elders, but preceptors, learned authors, and editors, aye, and even from clergymen themselves.”⁵ Indeed, Davidson actively capitalised on the publicity the altercation brought. When a Free Church minister preached against the pamphlet, Davidson brazenly used extracts from his sermon to advertise his work further, with “Fides” reluctantly conceding that many would now “read the book who would not otherwise have done so.”⁶

The success and vigour with which Alves’ local occultist defended his status as a man of erudition, honour and reason reflects the masculine ideal performed by men within esoteric networks in Britain during the 1880s and 1890s. It was rooted in the period’s notion of a stable, bounded and rational bourgeois masculine subjectivity, occult practice “predicated on the assertion of an aggrandizing self and the unabashed projection of magical authority.”⁷ For example, in *Morag the Seal* (1908), a novel by John William Brodie-Innes, an Edinburgh occultist with a highland estate five miles west of Alves, the protagonist’s exposure to esoteric knowledge is associated explicitly with the transition to full manhood, defined in terms of reasoned will, colonising power and independent intellect:

In a word, I felt that I had grown from an egotistical, cynical, and rather priggish boy, with one bound into a man; strong to love, and of will and determined to take and to hold what he loves; strong to reason and to understand; and knowing my strength, I was self-reliant.⁸

Furthermore, the milieu of occult organisations was that of a “gentleman’s private club,” with an emphasis on scholarly expertise, rational argument and rigorous debate above experiences and feelings, along with an attentiveness to bureaucratic

5. Letter from “Anglo-Indian,” *Elgin Courant*, 29 April 1884; letter from “The Author of the Divine Church,” 22 April 1884; letter from “Justitia,” “The Questionable Book - ‘The Divine Church,’” *Elgin Courant*, 28 March 1884.

6. Letter from “Fides,” *Elgin Courant*, 4 April 1884.

7. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 88.

8. Brodie-Innes, *Morag the Seal*, 208.

processes, such as minute taking and the archiving of club records.⁹ While some societies admitted women as members, including the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, others, like the Ghost Club, emphatically did not, with many male occultists viewing esotericism as a fundamentally masculine endeavour; Arthur A. Wells, a general secretary of the Theosophical Society’s English Section, stated in 1897 that theosophy was “a *man’s* religion,” in that it did not deal in the “soothing powders and lollypops” of Christianity, such as imagining one’s problems could be cured “by some mystic ‘washing in the blood of Jesus.’”¹⁰ It would not be until the early decades of the twentieth century, according to Dixon, that esotericism would be redefined as “a paradigmatically feminine enterprise.”¹¹

Yet despite occultism’s emphasis on willpower and its rarefied and masculinised ambiance, occult manhood, like all normative models, remained contradictory and unstable, for a number of reasons. Psychic ability was coded as feminine, the result of a three decades-long public fascination with spiritualism, a movement in which womanly passivity or self-renunciation was held as “the very quality which facilitated spirit communication,” the “leit-motif of powerful mediumship,” with female mediums highly regarded for that reason.¹² Esotericism’s model of the “scholarly gentleman,” intended in part to mitigate such associations, hardly projected an image of unequivocal manhood. In public discourse, scholarliness was persistently equated with effeteness, Ralph Waldo Emerson writing in 1838, “There goes in the world a notion that the scholar should be a recluse, a valetudinarian—as unfit for any handiwork or public labour.”¹³ A more explicit challenge to the occult male norm came from the women’s movement. If we accept,

9. The phrase is from Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 5. See also Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, 64–65, 67 and Luckhurst, “The Ghost Club.”

10. Arthur A. Wells, “The Enquirer,” *The Vahan*, September 1897, 3, cited in Dixon, *Divine Feminism*, 64.

11. Dixon, *Divine Feminism*, 67.

12. Owen, *The Darkened Room*, 10.

13. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar” (1837) in *The Annotated Emerson: Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. David Mikics (London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 80, cited in Ellis, *Masculinity and Science*, 132.

following R. W. Connell, that hegemonic masculinity is a primary mechanism in the maintenance of unequal power relations, women—structurally disadvantaged by patriarchy—are automatically invested in reforming its operation.¹⁴ During this period, contemporary women’s rights campaigners such as Emily Davies, Barbara Bodichon, Emily Massingberd and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson were staking claims to the very institutions upon which occultism was modelled—the club, but also the professional association and the university.¹⁵ Given esotericism’s already tenuous position as a contested and sometimes vilified voice in the period’s “crisis of faith,” described by Michael Ledger-Lomas as a “fluid contest between different sections of the intelligentsia for cultural authority, for the right to define what faith was,” the occult man needed to adapt fast if he was to preserve his privileges.¹⁶

Masculine fortification came in the form of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, a short-lived yet influential organisation known to outsiders as the “H. B. of L.” Co-founded in 1884 in Northeast Scotland by Davidson, the Brotherhood disseminated its teachings not within lodges or temples but by correspondence and via a monthly periodical, the *Occult Magazine*.¹⁷ Its distinctiveness centred on its instruction in practical occultism, including sex magic and clairvoyance through the use of magic mirrors, drawing heavily on the work of the Black

14. Connell, *Masculinities*, 77. Connell posited a direct, causal relationship between patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity in her definition of the latter as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” (77). However, this has been roundly critiqued by historians, John Tosh asserting that “it is never convincingly demonstrated why patriarchy should take precedence over all other structuring principles, to the extent that Connell affirms.” An intersectional understanding of power is instead pursued here, in which hegemonic masculinity upholds multiple, overlapping inequalities of gender, race, class and sexuality. Tosh, “Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender,” 53.

15. Davies (1830-1921) and Bodichon (1827-1891) founded Girton College, Cambridge in 1869; Garrett Anderson (1836-1917) was the first woman to gain membership of the British Medical Association in 1873; Massingberd (1847-1897) founded the Pioneer Club for women in 1892.

16. Ledger-Lomas, “Glimpses of the Great Conflict’,” 831.

17. Correspondence between American H. B. of L. members S. H. Randall and Thomas M. Johnson reveals the tentative formation in 1885 of two lodges in America, in the Midwest and in Rochester, New York, with instructions from Britain in early 1886 to establish a “Provisional Grand Lodge.” Bowen, “The Real Pure Yog’,” 164, 167.

American spiritualist, Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875). While the Theosophical Society, when it formed in New York in 1875, had initially encouraged its members to learn magical practices, by 1884 its founders Henry S. Olcott and Helena P. Blavatsky had begun to distance theosophy from its “occult roots,” emphasising instead “meditation, the intellectual study of religions and philosophy, and their own authority as spiritual leaders.”¹⁸ Yet it would be four years before practical tuition in magic would be provided again by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the Theosophical Society’s Esoteric Section. While scandal forced the disintegration of the H. B. of L. in Britain in 1886, after just two years of operation, its impact on both magical practice and more pertinent here, occult masculinity, was long-lasting.

This article is the first solely on the H. B. of L., focusing on the society’s British operation and its “Provincial Grand Master for the North,” Peter Davidson.¹⁹ Aside from work by Alex Owen, Joy Dixon and more recently Roger Luckhurst and Molly Youngkin, occult masculinities have received little sustained scholarly attention, with work focusing on associations with femininity and feminism.²⁰ Furthermore, recent studies on Scottish spiritualist, theosophical and occult networks have only partially incorporated a gendered analysis.²¹ This analysis employs an innovative, twofold methodology. Firstly, it fuses the approaches of microhistory and biography to trace in detail Davidson’s formation of a coherent, masculine sense of self. Given that Davidson left behind very little life writing, this has only been possible because of the “digital turn,” allowing me with relative ease

18. Bowen, “The Real Pure Yog’,” 160.

19. The analysis has benefitted from the anthology of primary sources relating to the Brotherhood of Luxor: see Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*.

20. See Basham, *The Trial of Woman*; Burfield, “Theosophy and Feminism”; Dixon, *Divine Feminism*; Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism*; Hale, *Essays on Women in Western Esotericism*; Hedenborg White, *The Eloquent Blood*; Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*; Kontou, ed., *Women and the Victorian Occult*; Owen, *The Darkened Room, The Place of Enchantment*; McCormick, Mitchell and Soares, eds, *The Female Fantastic*.

21. See Cheadle, “Re-sexing Religion in Suburban Glasgow” in *Sexual Progressives*, 80–114; Foot, “Modern Spiritualism and Scottish Art”; Richardson, *Second Sight*; Shaw, *The Fin-de-Siècle Scottish Revival* and “Theosophy in Scotland.”

to “switch incrementally between scales of enquiry and perspective,” tracing and contextualising diverse aspects of his life.²² His self formation occurred through his acculturation during childhood in a series of “cultural circuits,” localised sites for the performance, interpretation and continual reworking of a shared set of masculine norms.²³ As Graham Dawson notes:

Subjective composure fundamentally depends upon social recognition, with its power to confirm that the version of self and world figured in a narrative correspond to those of other people; that they not only exist in the imagination of the storyteller, but resonate with the experience of others, as shared, collective identities and realities.²⁴

For Davidson, these cultural circuits included—from his birth in 1837 to his departure to Virginia in 1886—his family, his Presbyterian and Catholic neighbours, his school, and the seminary near Aberdeen. Here, Davidson learnt a repertoire of masculine identities, some locally specific, others with national resonance, including the domestic patriarch, the breadwinning provider, the “lad o’ pairts” (Scots for a humble yet promising young scholar), and the Catholic priest.²⁵ As Dawson again notes, each identity was determined and delimited by “powerful hegemonic constraints,” which installed some masculine ideals as “more appropriate and recognizable than others.”²⁶ Davidson’s attainment of them was by no means assured, but instead required a series of circumstances, accommodations and strategies to ensure his lived experience matched the normative ideals, a process

22. Laite, “The Emmet’s Inch,” 975.

23. Graham Dawson finds Richard Johnson’s concept of “cultural circuits” instructive in ascertaining “how it is that some forms of masculinity are more readily accessible, and thus are in a better position to elicit public recognition, than others.” As Ben Griffin argues, the concept represents a more precise and functional model for the historian in identifying the “technologies and mechanisms through which power relations are produced” than Connell’s original 1995 conceptualisation of a single masculine hierarchy operating across society, and Connell and Messerschmidt’s subsequent 2005 distinction between global, regional and local arenas. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 24; Griffin, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 385-86; Connell, *Masculinity*, 77-81 and Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” 849-51.

24. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 23.

25. Laite, “The Emmet’s Inch,” 964.

26. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 24.

Ben Griffin has termed “the practical politics of complicity.”²⁷ Their successful performance nonetheless earned Davidson the “patriarchal dividends” of economic autonomy, domestic authority, a superior education, public stature and demarcated leisure time, in relation to women and men lower down the masculine hierarchy.²⁸ It was this masculine privilege which allowed him to become an expert on esotericism and to co-found an international occult organisation.

Secondly, the article employs concepts from sociological theory to trace the mechanics of male power within the cultural circuit of occultism. It draws on Connell’s original 1995 theory of “hegemonic masculinity” and its understanding of ideal manhood as an “historically mobile relation.”²⁹ However, it also engages with the intervening years’ numerous critiques, revisions and reformulations, including Demetrakis Demetriou’s concept of “hybridisation.”³⁰ Here, patriarchy’s continued global dominance after the advent of second-wave feminism is explained through the deceptive appropriation by the male ideal of elements from subordinated (gay) and marginalised (Black, working-class) masculinities to form a new “hegemonic bloc”; while this new configuration of masculinity “appears counter-hegemonic and progressive,” it remains “nonetheless an instrument of backwardness and patriarchal reproduction,” rendering male privilege less visible, and with the radical potential of particular practices lost in translation.³¹ The H. B. of L.’s reworking of occult masculinity can be explained in similar, if modified, terms. I argue that by co-opting policies from first-wave feminism, such as the reform of divorce law, and borrowing

27. By complicit, Griffin here means complicit with hegemonic masculinity, according to Connell’s original hierarchy. Griffin, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 388; Connell, *Masculinity*, 79–80.

28. R. W. Connell defines the phrase “patriarchal dividends” as “the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women.” Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.

29. Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

30. These include Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept”; Demetriou, “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique”; Ditz, “The New Men’s History”; Donaldson, “What is Hegemonic Masculinity?”; Duncanson, “Hegemonic Masculinity and the Possibility of Change”; Griffin, “Hegemonic Masculinity”; and Tosh, “Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender.”

31. Demetriou, “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique,” 355.

features from another hegemonic ideal, that of the newly reconfigured active “man of science,” the organisation constructed a new “hybrid” form of occult masculinity, one which incorporated progressive ideas but which nonetheless reproduced late-Victorian hierarchies of gender, class, race and sexuality.

Becoming a Man in “Outlandish” Northeast Scotland

Davidson was born in the rural county of Banffshire, a place far removed, both culturally and geographically, from occultism’s administrative hubs of London and Edinburgh, and somewhere Davidson himself later characterised as “outlandish” or remote.³² He was the seventh and final child of James Davidson and Helen Simpson, who were both local to the area, the couple living out their married life within the three adjacent parishes of Rathven, Grange and Bellie.³³ The north of the region was dominated by the fishing industry; further south, farming predominated—both cattle and arable—despite a clay soil “much complained of” and a landscape “exposed to very high winds from almost every quarter.”³⁴ Small-scale cloth and lime manufacture, along with salmon fishing on the River Spey, further supported a population across the three parishes of 10,920 in 1841.³⁵ Only from the 1880s would Banffshire’s population decline, with young women in particular lured by the popular culture, regular working hours and opportunities for social mobility offered by Scotland’s cities.³⁶

32. Letter from Peter Davidson to F. W. Irwin, 15 November 1877, MSS 39/2/6/4, Library and Museum of Freemasonry; “outlandish, adj. and n.,” OED Online, Oxford University Press, accessed 9 February 2022, <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/view/Entry/133711?redirectedFrom=outlandish&>.

33. James Davidson, b. 5 February 1786. Old Parish Registers, Births 147/30 487 Banff; Hellen Simpson, b. 10 June 1796. Old Parish Registers, Births 164/10 345 Rathven; Marriage record for James Davidson and Helen Simpson, 25 May 1818. Old Parish Registers, Marriages 164/20 215 Rathven.

34. Sinclair, *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, Grange, Banff, Vol. 9, 553, 563.

35. The figure has been obtained by adding the population figures for Bellie, Grange and Rathven in the 1845 *New Statistical Account of Scotland*. See Gordon, *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, 115–23, 213–19, 245–70.

36. For a full analysis of the pace, scale and causes of rural depopulation, see Smout, *A History of Scottish People*, 58–84.

The period was one in which the gender ideology of separate spheres—albeit riven with internal contradictions and always contested—was at its apotheosis, with social processes including industrial capitalism, rapid urbanisation, evangelicalism, and an expanded public sphere resulting in “existing expectations about the proper roles of men and women [being] re-worked with a significantly different emphasis.”³⁷ Always a prescriptive bourgeois ideal rather than a lived experience, its impact on the labouring classes was diffuse and complex, with married women’s paid labour remaining critical to the survival of many families. Nonetheless, for boys growing up in Banffshire, breadwinning constituted the expectation, if not always the reality, of their future familial role; as Emma Griffin states, “it would be hard to exaggerate the significance of work for male identity.”³⁸ At around aged fifteen, boys began paid employment, becoming apprenticed to trades such as blacksmithing, masonry or millwrighting, or working as agricultural labourers with a view to eventually owning their own croft.³⁹ Their resulting economic independence by their mid-twenties allowed them to marry and become providers for their wives and children, the aspirations of ploughmen summarised by one male farmer as “a good wife, a good cow, and a good razor.”⁴⁰ Davidson’s father was thirty-two when he married, and appears to have been a constant provider. When Davidson was born, he perhaps worked at the linen or woollen mill at Gollachie, a small settlement close to the coast;⁴¹ by 1841, the family had relocated twelve miles to the south, living in the servants’ quarters of a farm while his father was employed as a toll keeper.⁴² Ten years later would find the Davidsons

37. Davidoff and Hall, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” *Family Fortunes*, xvi.

38. Griffin, *Bread Winner*, 63.

39. Blaikie, “The Country and the City,” 85; Carter, “Farmlife in Northeast Scotland.”

40. Stuart, *Agricultural Labourers*, 20.

41. The first six of their children, born between 12 April 1819 and 25 March 1825, are all recorded as being baptised at “Golloch” or “Mill of Golloghy.” See for example, Alexander Davidson, b. 29 April 1820, Catholic Registers Births and Baptisms, MP 31 1 1 1 74, Preshome, St. Gregory’s. For details of the mill at Gollachie, see Sinclair, *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, Rathven, Banff, 425 and Lewis, “Edinkillie - Eyemouth,” *A Topographical Dictionary of Scotland*, 392–411.

42. The family are described in the 1841 Census as living in the “servants sleeping room” of Auchinhove farm. 1841 Census 156/2/1.

back north, this time in the village of Nether Dallachy, his father now a grocer.⁴³ Peter's older brothers entered trades of comparable status, becoming journeymen (blacksmiths) and dykers (masons).⁴⁴

Gendered power relations within the Davidson family would have been patriarchal, Fraserburgh fisherwoman Christian Watt recollecting how wives at this time "foolishly believed they must obey their husbands."⁴⁵ While the last century had seen marriage shift from a primarily economic union to a companionate one, a more egalitarian domestic politics did not automatically result. As Katie Barclay has shown in her work on Scottish elite couples, while the era's "new modes of loving" did contain democratic potential, destabilising "lines of power" and opening up spaces for negotiation, they ultimately secured patriarchy's survival by allowing couples to "relieve tensions and reconcile new experiences within patriarchal values."⁴⁶ Male authority within marriage would not be subject to sustained feminist challenge until the 1860s and beyond, with the institution of women's suffrage societies and the "Great Marriage Debate" of 1888, in which New Woman Mona Caird declared the institution to be a "vexatious failure." Some gains in legal status were made, with the Married Women's Property (Scotland) Acts of 1878 and 1881 protecting wives' earned and inherited property from their husbands; however, as James Hammerton notes, "it will perhaps come as no surprise to discover that efforts to reconstruct men's behaviour, and marital relationships generally, failed to match the heightened criticism."⁴⁷

The repertoire of masculine identities taught to Davidson within the cultural circuits of his family and their Banffshire neighbours, of breadwinning provision and patriarchal authority, was supplemented during boyhood by two other ideals of manhood: the scholar and the priest. His family were part of a small but significant recusant population of Catholics in Northeast Scotland,

43. 1841, 1851, 1861 Census. By 1861, James Simpson described himself as a "retired merchant."

44. 1861 Census.

45. Fraser, *The Christian Watt Papers*, 115.

46. Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, 203-4.

47. Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship*, 7.

constituting 22% of the otherwise predominantly Presbyterian inhabitants of the parish of Rathven.⁴⁸ Communicants were served locally by four priests and a bishop operating out of Catholic churches at Fochabers, Preshome and Keith, with Peter baptised into the faith along with his six siblings.⁴⁹ Educational provision was more piecemeal, with the nearest Catholic school in the town of Huntley in Aberdeenshire, an impractical twenty miles away.⁵⁰ Instead, like the majority of Catholics in this period, Peter presumably attended a local Protestant school, Bellie's parish school supplemented by three run by the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), an infant school established by the Duchess of Gordon, three partially endowed schools and two run by entrepreneurial teachers "on their own adventure."⁵¹ His teacher would most likely have been male. In contrast to the profession in England, which by the 1860s had undergone significant feminisation, men dominated teaching in Scotland, with the Presbyterian kirk prejudiced against women teachers for anything other than domestic subjects. Only with the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act, when power was transferred to locally elected school boards, did gender ratios shift decisively towards women.⁵² Discursively as well

48. According to the 1845 *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, the population of Rathven was 6,826, with 1,500 of those Catholic communicants. Gordon, *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, 256, 265.

49. The Roman Catholic Church of St Mary's at Fochabers was built in 1826, St. Gregory's at Preshome in 1788 and St. Thomas's at Keith in 1831-2. Peter's older siblings were Margaret, Alexander, Ann, Helen, John and James and were born between 12 April 1819 and 25 March 1825. There was then a gap of twelve years before Peter was born. He was baptised on 20 March 1837 in St Thomas's; his sponsors were Father Walter Lovi and Betty Simpson (presumably a relative of his mother). See baptismal records for St. Gregory's Church, Preshome and St. Thomas's Church, Keith, Catholic Registers Births and Baptism, MP 27 1114.

50. There were also Catholic schools at Braemar, Inverness, Aberdeen and Woodside. Kehoe, *Creating a Scottish Church*, 113.

51. Gordon, "Bellie," *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, 122. In 1867, only 13% of Catholic children in Perthshire attended Catholic schools. McDermid, *The Schooling of Working-Class Girls*, 20.

52. The new school boards were the first local government body women could both vote for, and be elected onto. However, Helen Corr has argued that the subsequent dramatic increase in the employment of women, who by 1911 constituted 70% of teachers, was a result not of changes in gendered governance, but instead "economic necessity," with boards taking advantage of women's lower wages. Corr, "Dominies and Domination," 154, 155; Moore, "Education and Learning," 123.

as materially, teaching was also a masculine endeavour. The schoolmaster or “dominie,” a Latin-derived Scots word meaning “lord” or “master,” constituted a key element in a powerful national myth of a superior and meritocratic Presbyterian educational system, in which an able and ambitious working-class “lad o’ pairts,” tutored in Latin and mathematics as part of a broad-based curriculum, had equal access to a Scottish university.⁵³

In both his “dominie” and his priest, Davidson appears to have found a compelling masculine ideal. His later love of scholarship suggests a bookish and precocious child, and by aged fifteen he was a pupil teacher, a practice recently imported from England and envisaged as an apprenticeship for school teaching.⁵⁴ Yet education was evidently not his calling. Instead, he diverted his erudition towards more explicitly spiritual ends, at some point in his childhood studying for the priesthood. He must therefore have attended Blair’s College, the junior seminary in the East of Scotland, located on the South bank of the River Dee, near Aberdeen.⁵⁵ In Catholicism, like Protestantism, the ordained vocations were exclusively male and the College was a homosocial environment, with the only women present domestic servants, with whom seminarians were sometimes forbidden to speak. Boys typically entered between the ages of 11 and 16 and were taught how to become men above and apart from others, the priesthood requiring them to be “exemplary Christians, brilliant scholars, disciplined (celibate) males, loyal subjects of the Pope, and approachable ‘fathers’ to their parishioners.”⁵⁶

53. That Scotland’s “democratic” educational tradition excluded girls and women, with no equivalent “lass o’ pairts,” has been highlighted by a number of feminist historians. As Lindy Moore states, “The seeming inclusiveness of the concept hid fundamental gender differences and inequalities by foregrounding the masculine as the norm,” while research by Moore, and Jane McDermid has revealed that girls were less likely to attend school, or to attend consistently or for an extended period, and were more likely to receive a restricted education focused on domestic skills. Universities in Scotland were not open to women until 1893. Moore, “Education and Learning,” 111; Moore, “Invisible Scholars,” 121-37; McDermid, *The Schooling of Working-Class Girls*, 27-55.

54. 1851 Census. The pupil teacher system was introduced in Scotland in 1846. McDermid, *The Schooling of Working-Class Girls*, 35.

55. White County Historical Society, “Descendants of Peter Davidson of Scotland.”

56. Saarinen, “Boys to Manly Men of God,” 113.

At the local level, the masculine identities of scholar and priest appear to have been hegemonic. Indeed, the stereotype of the “lad o’ pairts,” familiar across Scotland, may have held particular purchase in the Northeast, with two universities, a small population and competitive bursaries creating an environment in which, according to Lindy Moore, the ideal “came closest to reality.”⁵⁷ Despite perceptions of the region as remote, with its farmers reputed for their “plain and unaffected manners,” an equally prized attribute of manhood was erudition, as evidenced by “intellectual, moral, and religious attainments.”⁵⁸ Yet in public discourse at a national level, both ideals were vulnerable to charges of effeminacy. This discrepancy is reflective, as Griffin has stated, of “the variegated and uneven dissemination” of masculine norms, with “localised communities” often holding very different values to those found elsewhere, and only the middle and upper classes participating in “a more unified and genuinely national communication community,” through shared institutions and print culture.⁵⁹ While Thomas Carlyle’s 1840 representation of the “man of letters” has been interpreted as an attempt to “redeem the ‘manfulness’ of intellectual labour,” Heather Ellis asserts that to him and his contemporaries, it sometimes seemed “that formal education through books and true manliness did not go together.”⁶⁰ In a letter written in 1824 he exclaimed of writers that “they are not red-blooded *men* at all, they are only *things* for writing ‘articles’.”⁶¹ Priests were similarly at risk of their masculinity being maligned. While historiographical debate continues over the timing, nature and extent of the feminisation of religion across nineteenth-century Europe, it is clear that male piety attracted suspicions of effeminacy and homosexuality.⁶² For

57. Moore, “Invisible Scholars,” 132.

58. Gordon, “Rathven,” *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, 256.

59. Griffin, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 385.

60. Ellis, *Masculinity and Science*, 120–21.

61. Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 24 June 1824. *Carlyle Letters* vol. 3, 90–91, cited in *ibid.*, 121.

62. For a discussion of the “feminisation thesis” see Van Osselaer and Buerman, “‘Feminisation’ thesis: a survey.”

priests, such suspicions were magnified by the particular features of Catholic masculinity: the homosocial environments of seminary and monastery; celibacy and its preclusion from marriage and fatherhood; and ambiguities in external signifiers such as dress and facial hair, in 1860 one critic associating a priest's shaven chin with Catholicism's "spiritual slavery."⁶³

In each instance, these charges precipitated a process of "hybridisation." However, this did not work in the manner originally conceptualised by Demetriou, of the subversive appropriation of practices from subordinate and marginalised masculinities; rather, unambiguously "manly" qualities were co-opted from the normative ideals of other cultural circuits to bolster the hegemonic position, a technique Davidson would later deploy when founding the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor. As Connell argued, it is precisely this integrative and protean quality which underwrites patriarchy's resilience. Scholars were redrawn as men of action, with Emerson declaiming in 1838, "Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without, he is not yet man."⁶⁴ Similarly, within Catholicism, pious values were "linked with masculine themes such as nationalism, imperialism, sportsmanship, gentle fatherhood, camaraderie and self-control," with one Scottish Catholic priest described in 1835 as a "young soldier of the Cross."⁶⁵

At some point, like teaching, the priesthood was abandoned, and Davidson decided not to be ordained. However, many of the masculine lessons from his boyhood would remain with him as an adult, as he turned his back on the Catholic ministry and celibacy and chose a radically different path: of romantic love, tax inspection and sex magic.

63. Theologos, *Shaving: A Bread of the Sabbath and a Hindrance to the Spread of the Gospel*, 2nd ed. (London: Saunders, Otley and Co., 1860), 10, cited in Oldstone-Moore, "The Beard Movement," 22.

64. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar" (1837) cited in Ellis, *Masculinity and Science*, 132.

65. Saarinen, "Boys to manly men of God," 115.

The Origins of the H. B. of L.

A family anecdote, relayed many years later by Davidson’s granddaughters, describes how he “was studying for the Catholic priesthood and was about to go to Rome to become a priest” but “saw Christina Ross and fell in love and left the priesthood.”⁶⁶ Christina was born in c. 1838 in the agricultural parish of Birse in Kincardineshire, sixty miles south of Davidson’s family’s home in Banffshire.⁶⁷ She was the youngest of four children of Alexander Ross and Margaret Webster, farmers of a relatively modest sixty acres of pasture and arable land, who like the Davidsons were Catholic.⁶⁸ Before her marriage, she had worked as a servant and then housekeeper.⁶⁹ Interestingly, her elder sister appears to have had a daughter out-of-wedlock, which the family continued to support.⁷⁰ While clearly in contradiction to strict Catholic teachings on sex, the incident is reflective of the region’s high illegitimacy levels, in which pre-marital sex was often tacitly sanctioned by parents—and even kirk elders—as an ancient form of fertility testing, “many a mother,” according to a participant in an 1888 survey, believing “It’s nae sae bad as stealing or deen’ awa’ with the puir craters.”⁷¹

The couple married in 1866 in Kincardine O’Neil in a Catholic ceremony.⁷² That their relationship was precipitated by Peter “falling in love” with Christina is indicative of the rise of new romantic ideals, albeit that the family still retained

66. White County Historical Society, “Descendants of Peter Davidson of Scotland,” 8.

67. There is a degree of discrepancy over Christina Ross’s birthdate, with no birth certificate traceable and different dates indicated by the census data and marriage certificate. However, it appears most likely that she was born in c. 1838.

68. 1851, 1861 Census. The farm was named “Gallan” and employed four labourers. Unlike the Davidsons in Banffshire, Christina Ross’s family may have been the only Roman Catholics in their parish, the *New Statistical Account* for Strachan detailing only one Catholic family in 1845, with the vast majority Church of Scotland. Gordon, “Strachan,” *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, 240.

69. 1861 Census; marriage certificate for Peter Davidson and Christina Ross, 21 October 1866.

70. 1861, 1871 Census. The niece was also named Christina.

71. William Crammond, *Illegitimacy in Banffshire, Facts, Figures and Opinions* (Banff, 1888), 47, 49, cited in Blaikie, “The Country and the City.”

72. Marriage certificate for Peter Davidson and Christina Ross, 21 October 1866.

a role in courtship and that most marital unions remained within the individuals' social class. As Barclay notes, such ideals were gendered, with the expectation that men were the protagonists and women the passive receivers of love.⁷³ Playing the romantic lead was an easier role to fulfil than breadwinner, however. Since 1858, when aged 21, Peter had worked as an inland revenue officer, latterly at the local Glenburgie whisky distillery.⁷⁴ While it constituted an appropriate line of work for a "lad o' pairts," contrasting with the trades pursued by his brothers, it appears to have been poorly paid, at least initially.⁷⁵ For five years, the couple lived with Christina's sister Margaret and brother John in the town of Banchory in Aberdeenshire, a compromise necessitated by economic circumstance and one example of the numerous gaps which existed "between the cultural ideal and the practice of masculinity."⁷⁶ By 1871 however, Peter had achieved one of the key signifiers of full manhood, establishing an independent household in the village of Alves, close to his childhood home, where the couple settled to raise their five children.⁷⁷

Accompanying Davidson's privileged status as a breadwinner and patriarch came leisure time. This meant he was able, in the evenings, to have hobbies, while his wife cared for their children. One of these was music. Peter was a self-taught violin maker and player, writing a detailed and erudite guide to their construction, heralded by the *Pall Mall Gazette* as a "book of great general

73. Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, 202.

74. Davidson became an excise officer for the Inland Revenue in 1858 when aged twenty-one. This suggests his desire to become a Catholic priest came later, just prior to his marriage, if the family anecdote is to be believed. That Davidson was stationed at Glenburgie is indicated by the header paper used for his correspondence to Captain Irwin in November 1877. Inland Revenue entry papers for Peter Davidson, July 1858, CUST 116/48/66, National Archives, Kew.

75. As tradesmen, his brothers exemplified Carlyle's ideal hero of the "natural man," present only within "the *un*-educated classes (those educated by experience)." Thomas Carlyle, "James Carlyle" (January 1832) in *Reminiscences*, ed. J. A. Froude (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1881), 9, cited in Ellis, *Masculinity and Science*, 121, 122.

76. We know this because the Davidsons' son John was born in Alves in c. 1871 (1881 Census). The quote is from Griffin, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 388.

77. 1871 Census.

merit.”⁷⁸ He clearly composed and played too, the well-known Scottish fiddler and dance master James Scott Skinner writing a tune for him.⁷⁹ Indeed, there is an indication that music was a source of divine communion. In the 1884 debate in the *Elgin Courant*, “Anglo-Indian” noted that Davidson “fiddled for inspiration.”⁸⁰ However, the second hobby, and the one that provided the cultural circuit in which Davidson would not just perform but reshape masculine identity, was occultism.

Davidson’s interest in the occult had been present since childhood. In correspondence with the Bristol-based mason Captain Francis George Irwin, he stated he had been “passionately fond of the occult” since a “mere boy,” with his interest provided an “extra stimulus” by the spiritualist movement of the 1850s and ‘60s.⁸¹ By the time he had married and moved to Alves he had amassed a library of esoteric works and had become “an initiate,” presumably of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor although this is not explicitly stated. He advanced in his studies as time permitted, despite not finding his occupation of tax officer ideal “for that state of mind conducive to occultism.”⁸² He told Irwin that with his wife and children, he had upon various occasions, and without the use of mediums or props such as cabinets, veils “or other such mediumistic

78. Charles Reader, “Cremona Varnish,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 31 August 1872; Davidson, *The Violin* (1871). In a later, fifth edition, Davidson makes clear his amateur status, claiming to have never received a lesson in violin making or playing, and that the information in the book was “derived chiefly from my own experience.” Davidson, “Preface,” *The Violin* (1895), III.

79. Letter from “Anglo-Indian, Elgin,” *Elgin Courant*, 11 April 1884; “J. Scott Skinner’s Compliments to Mr Peter Davidson,” in Skinner, *The Miller O’Hirn Collection*, 38.

80. Letter from “Anglo-Indian,” *Elgin Courant*, 11 April 1884.

81. Letters from Peter Davidson to F. W. Irwin, 10 and 15 November 1877, MSS 39/2/6/3 and 4, Library and Museum of Freemasonry.

82. Ibid. That Davidson’s interest in occultism was long-standing is corroborated by a letter from the mason and Rosicrucian Hargrave Jennings in January 1884, Jennings writing “I have known you now for many years.” Facsimile of letter from Hargrave Jennings to Peter Davidson, 11 January 1884, in Greenfield, *The Story of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light*, 41. Davidson shared his occupation with Alfred Alaric Watts: occultist, spiritualist and founder member of the London-based “Ghost Club.” Luckhurst, “The Ghost Club,” 75.

trumpety,” experienced visitations in their home of “bright angelic beings, shining in their radiance and glory of the Astral Light.”⁸³ While anyone could in theory see the spirits, he had not disclosed their presence to individuals outwith his family. Despite evidence of a local following for his occult teachings, Davidson remained cautious of exposure within his Presbyterian dominated neighbourhood, predicting it would lead to “Scotch Kirk self certified lunatics” ransacking his house and declaring him “drunk with his distillery fumes,” despite the fact, he was careful to relate to Irwin, he was “a total abstainer.”⁸⁴ In 1878, Davidson published *Man Know Thyself: The Philosophy of Man*, a guide to the healing and mystical power of plants and herbs, and in April 1880 he joined the Theosophical Society.⁸⁵ However, it was with the occult organisation he co-founded and led in Britain between 1884–6 that Davidson exerted the most influence on Western esotericism. More particularly, his reshaping of the occult male ideal would prove formative within esoteric circles for years to come.

The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, or H. B. of L. as it was known to the uninitiated, first announced itself to the public in late 1884 in the back of a new edition of *The Divine Pyramider of Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus*, edited by the Bath occult bookseller, Robert H. Fryar. It immediately positioned itself as a rival to the Theosophical Society, founded nine years earlier in New York, the advertisement inviting any theosophists “disappointed in their expectations of Sublime Wisdom being freely dispensed by HINDOO MAHATMAS” to contact the book’s editor.⁸⁶ According to Davidson, however, the Brotherhood had been

83. Letters from Peter Davidson to F. W. Irwin, 10 and 15 November 1877, MSS 39/2/6/3 and 4, Library and Museum of Freemasonry.

84. Letter from Peter Davidson to F. W. Irwin, 15 November 1877, MSS 39/2/6/4, Library and Museum of Freemasonry.

85. *The Theosophist*, April 1880, 192.

86. *The Divine Pyramider of Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus* (Bath: Robert H. Fryar, 1884), 112 cited in Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 306. This advertisement was then repeated in the review of the work in *The Theosophist* in November 1884, 46–47, and in a revised form, in the *Occult Magazine*.

active since 1870, at least in its present, public iteration. An anonymous adept of the order's ancient Interior Circle had decided to recruit a neophyte. They chose the Polish Jewish kabbalist and occultist Max Théon (1848–1927), instructing him in “the principles of Occult Science, and the ancient Wisdom-Religion,” Théon becoming the H. B. of L.'s “Grand Master of the Exterior Circle.”⁸⁷ Next to be recruited was the Isle-of-Man born medium Thomas Henry Burgoyne (1855–1894), who became the organisation's secretary: so the story goes, Burgoyne was sat on a park bench, reading an occult text and Théon, described as “an old Gentleman of foreign appearance,” commented “you are young to read a book like that,” before inviting him to dine at his house.⁸⁸ After instructing Burgoyne, Théon had no further influence on the organisation. Davidson dated his own involvement from 1871, although the nature of his initiation is unknown. He became the H. B. of L.'s “Provincial Grand Master for the North,” with William Alexander Ayton (1816–1909)—an Oxford-based curate—the “Provincial Grand Master for the South.”⁸⁹

The H. B. of L. had a much older history, however, one recounted by Davidson in a letter to the French occultist and astrologer Albert Faucheux in July 1887.⁹⁰ This account made manifest the precise distinction Davidson drew between the Brotherhood and the Theosophical Society, which centred on the tuition of practical magic, and was informed by gendered and racial assumptions. The order originated, according to Davidson, 4,320 years ago, with earnest toilers and truth-seekers gathering around “the Divine Grand-Master Hermes Trismegistus” in Luxor.⁹¹ The identification of Egypt and not

87. Letter from Peter Davidson to “F.Ch. Barlet” (Albert Faucheux), July 1887, “Origin and Object of the HBL. Formation, teachings, objects of the Exterior circle of the HBL,” in Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 95.

88. Letter from Gorham Blake to “a Member of Committee of H. B. of L.,” 10 July 1886, in Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 360–64.

89. In an editorial for *The Occult Magazine*, Davidson stated he had been a member of the Brotherhood for “upwards of fourteen years.” *The Occult Magazine* 6, July 1885, 1.

90. “Origin and Object of the HBL,” in Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 93–97.

91. *Ibid.*, 93.

India as the birthplace of occultism was critical. It allowed Davidson to construct the H. B. of L. as a source of much-needed “active vitality” able to galvanise a Western mind “vitiated” by the present “Budhist Cult” (sic).⁹² Drawing on Oriental stereotypes of the effeminate and sexually deviant Indian male Other, Theosophy’s emphasis on esoteric philosophy or “metaphysical meditations” were depicted as a consequence of Hindu degeneracy and a “passive life of indolence”; the Egyptians, by contrast, excelled “*as practical occultists,*” including the teaching of magic, alchemy, astrology and mathematics.⁹³ It was with practical occult science, not metaphysical abstractions, that the (manly) future of Western occultism lay.

Sex Magic, Esoteric Science and Hybridisation

Unlike other organisations of the fin-de-siècle occult revival, the H. B. of L. in Britain did not meet physically in lodges or temples. Instead, it disseminated its teachings—and its model of esoteric manhood—in two ways: one public, one private. Firstly, it published a monthly, four-page periodical, co-edited by Davidson and Burgoyne, which ran from January 1885 and was called initially the *Occultist* and subsequently the *Occult Magazine*. It consisted of articles primarily by the two men, writing as “Mejnour” (Davidson) and “Zanoni” (Burgoyne), along with reprints of Hermetic texts, responses to readers’ letters, and adverts for “Mirrors for developing lucidity,” made by Davidson.⁹⁴ The journal ran for almost two years, and although priced at a modest one penny and sold in Greece, India and the US as well as Aberdeen, Liverpool and London, the editors were constantly looking to increase circulation, at one point offering a free mirror to the individual who attracted the most subscribers within six months.⁹⁵

92. *Ibid.*, 94, 96.

93. *Ibid.*, 94.

94. *Occult Magazine* 1, February 1885. Davidson is listed as a “Cabinet-maker” in Banchory, Kincardineshire, where he used to live with his sister- and brother-in-law.

95. *Occult Magazine* 11, December 1885.

While the periodical provided “brief instructions” on the H. B. of L.’s teachings and strived to answer “all doubts and objections,” it contained no specific details of the order’s practical instruction or “Higher Knowledge,” hints of which, Davidson stated “must inevitably be guarded and limited.”⁹⁶ Instead, aspirants were encouraged to apply for membership. This required the sending of a natal horoscope, or the information required to draw one up, along with a small fee; if considered suitable, an extended correspondence with a Master would begin, Davidson stating that “to be practically successful” in occultism “you must undergo a careful training under the care of a properly qualified teacher.”⁹⁷ The initiate would then be enlightened on confidential information such as the Brotherhood’s origin, structure and operation, and sent questionnaires, pledges and initiatory rites. In addition, new members would be sent a slip of paper to be burned after reading, disclosing the H. B. of L.’s full name, a secret kept successfully until the 1930s.⁹⁸

The clandestine approach was necessitated by the transgressive nature of the H. B. of L.’s magical practice, which centred around sex magic and clairvoyance, and may have involved the use of hallucinogenic drugs.⁹⁹ In its “erotic philosophy,” it appears to have been influenced by its co-founder Théon and his wife Madame Théon, their ideas later published anonymously in the

96. *Occult Magazine* 3, April 1885; “The Veil of Isis – Part VI. By Zanoni,” *Occult Magazine* 9, October 1885.

97. *Occult Magazine* 7, August 1885.

98. Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 3.

99. As Godwin, Chanel and Deveney note, drug taking is not referenced explicitly in the Brotherhood archival materials as a part of its magical practice. However, according to a letter from Ayton to an American neophyte dated 30 March 1887, a hallucinogenic drug played a key role in Ayton’s initiation. Davidson also wrote positively about the mystical qualities of drugs in his 1892 book on mistletoe, asserting that “the secrets of the herbs of dreams, and enchantments, are only lost to common science...except in a few marked instances, such as Opium, Hashish, and the psychical effects of even these few upon the human system are regarded as evidences of a temporary mental disorder!” Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 75-77; Davidson, *The Mistletoe and its Philosophy*, 38.

Parisian occult journal, *Revue Cosmique*.¹⁰⁰ Its sexual rites were adapted from the magical system of the Black American spiritualist, utopian and abolitionist, Paschal Beverly Randolph. Born in the slums of New York, Randolph was of mixed-race heritage, variously claiming white, Native American, Madagascan and African American ancestry.¹⁰¹ He was one of a number of American and European spiritualists and occultists during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century who espoused theories on sex as a means of divine communion or transcendence. They included in the US, Thomas Lake Harris (1823-1906), Ida Craddock (1857-1902) and Alice Bunker Stockham (1833-1912); and in Europe Theodor Reuss (1855-1923), Lady Caithness or Maria Mariátegui Sinclair (1830-1895) and later Aleister Crowley (1875-1947).¹⁰² In many instances, the dissemination of their views resulted in social and sometimes legal censure, their articulation disrupting what Foucault termed the period's "restrictive economy" around sex—its silences, euphemisms and censorship—despite a proliferation of regulatory discourses.¹⁰³ For example, Randolph was arrested and briefly imprisoned in 1872 for selling "obscene" free-love literature; Harris was forced to leave his utopian colony in Santa Rosa, California in 1891, after a journalist exposed his "accursed doctrine" of conjugal marriage; and Craddock committed suicide in 1902 after being found guilty of selling and distributing obscene literature under the Comstock laws.¹⁰⁴ Davidson would have been acutely aware of the need for an assiduous policing of the public-private boundary, keeping all practical instruction strictly for private circulation among initiates.

100. Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 214, 11-16.

101. Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 1-8; Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, 63-65.

102. For historical surveys of sex magic within esotericism, see Hanegraaff and Kripal, *Hidden Intercourse*; Urban, *Magia Sexualis*; Versluis, *The Secret History of Western Sexual Mysticism*; and Pasi, "But What Does Esotericism have to do with Sex," 207-15.

103. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, 17-18.

104. Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 195-210; cited in Cheadle, *Sexual Progressives*, 93; Schmidt, *Heaven's Bride*, 179-224.

The H. B. of L.'s secret system of sex magic is known now only because of its later compilation by Burgoyne as a text entitled the "Mysteries of Eros."¹⁰⁵ Humans were divided into three Grades of Adeptship, with each Grade subdivided into three degrees. Only Grade One or the "Grade of Eros" was accessible to humans in the Brotherhood's Exterior Circle. Grade Two was for the spiritual beings originally from Egypt who constituted the adepts of the Interior Circle, and Grade Three for deific and angelic entities.¹⁰⁶ To progress through the first Grade required an initiate to develop their human potential, specifically through the practice of sex magic. The H. B. of L. believed, in common with Harris's Brotherhood of the New Life, another American-influenced organisation with roots in Scotland, that Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden had been one androgynous being, that the Fall had sundered its male and female aspects, and that reuniting with one's soulmate during selflessly pursued sex could have powerful and positive magical effects.¹⁰⁷ The "Ansairctic Arcanum" or Second Degree of Grade One stated that "the moment wherein a man discharges his seed, his essential self, into a willing or unwilling womb, is the most solemn, energetic and prayerful moment he can ever know on this earth."¹⁰⁸ However, initiates were to proceed with caution, with their practice subject to a number of closely delineated caveats.

The first was that sex magic was to be practiced by married couples only. For the most fortunate, their relationship would be a "true, soul union" or "spiritual marriage" with the being from whom you were separated when banished from the Garden of Eden. However, it was acknowledged that this state was rare. Most couples were in "natural unions" of two individuals who were compatible with each other, "as belonging to the same plane, state or center of emanative

105. Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 213. The text is reprinted at 219-78; for a discussion of its possible provenance, see 213.

106. *Ibid.*, 68-69.

107. Cheadle, *Sexual Progressives*, 87.

108. Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 243.

life.”¹⁰⁹ Infidelity within either of these “sacred and inviolable” partnerships was considered “one of the greatest crimes.”¹¹⁰ However, those in unhappy marriages, according to the H. B. of L., had a right to divorce and if the legal system “refused to untie the gordian knot” they were justified in “*cutting that knot themselves* and setting such unjust laws at defiance.”¹¹¹

Secondly, the two individuals practising sex magic needed—explicitly—to be “oppositely” gendered. This is because it was the union of two, complementary yet differentiated genders which when united in sex powerfully recreated the androgynous nature of the Deity. Typically, men brought wisdom, willpower and creativity, women love, passivity and an association with Nature:

Wisdom is masculine, active; Love, the feminine ray is passive. Each half completes its own portion of the Divine *Ego*, in accomplishing this it becomes an individual ray of Divinity, hence it has a complete likeness to its source. From this it will be readily perceived that it is *Sex* which gives complete expression to the two elevated properties of Deific Life—Love and Wisdom—and that it is to reach this aim that the *Ego* becomes differentiated. Wisdom and Love united form the Angelic Soul, the Perfected One, the Complete Soul.¹¹²

Numerous scholars have traced the emergence, within post-Enlightenment scientific and medical discourse, of an insistence on radically differentiated bodies, linking the new sexual dimorphism to threats to white, male privilege occasioned by philosophical ideas on equal rights, the woman question, imperial anxieties and the theory of evolution.¹¹³ Cynthia Eagle Russett, for example, asserts that an insistence on sexual difference worked to counter the “cosmic instabilities” caused by Charles Darwin, serving to “buffer Victorian gentlemen

109. “The Mysteries of Isis. Grade I, Third Degree” in “The Mysteries of Eros,” *ibid.*, 277.

110. *Ibid.*

111. *Ibid.*

112. [Peter Davidson], “THE TWIN-SOULS,” in *The Morning Star: A Monthly Journal of Mystical and Philosophical Research* 1, no. 1 (May 1892). This journal followed the *Occult Magazine* and was published by Davidson after he moved to America.

113. See for example, Laqueur, *Making Sex*; Sleeth Mosedale, “Science Corrupted”; Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science*; Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?*

from a too-threatening intimacy with the brutes.”¹¹⁴ Within occultism, uniting two opposite genders through sex magic was part of a broader “quest for psychic androgyny,” which had both radical and conservative adherents.¹¹⁵ As Dixon has noted, understandings of reincarnation in particular complicated the connection between individual identity and the sexed body, while also providing a means for some to explain their unconventional gender presentation or sexual desires in a way which went beyond the inversion model of sexology.¹¹⁶ Conversely, Scottish occultist and Davidson’s neighbour Brodie-Innes was not in sympathy with such ideas, in 1892 stating that “Masculine women and effeminate men are evolving merely the lower animal positive and negative qualities, and retarding rather than hastening their progress.”¹¹⁷

A third precondition of the H. B. of L.’s practice of sex magic was that prior to sex, abstinence was to be practiced for twenty-one to forty-nine days. During this period, the couple were to take frequent baths, pray, meditate and study philosophy, as well as act lovingly and honestly towards each other, avoiding all arguments.¹¹⁸ When they did have sex, crucially, it had to be animated by love not lust. Because of this, the teachings asserted, it was only recommended for those in the West, “a race sprung from the frozen bosom of the hardy North.”¹¹⁹ Repeating the colonial stereotypes of Indians present in Davidson’s account of the organisation’s origins, in the “Mysteries of Eros,” sex magic was to be avoided by “Orientals,” their “natural passions . . . infinitely more susceptible and excitable . . . and consequently, more liable to lead them astray.”¹²⁰ This, it was asserted, was the true reason behind theosophy’s advocacy of celibacy,

114. Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science*, 14.

115. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 109.

116. Dixon, “Sexology and the Occult,” 423, 428.

117. J.W.B.-I., “The Enquirer,” *Váhan* 2 (1892), 4, quoted in Dixon, “Sexology and the Occult,” 431.

118. “The Mysteries of Eros,” in Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 241-42.

119. *Ibid.*, 239.

120. *Ibid.*

as it drew its teachings from Hinduism. Unusually for the period, the H. B. of L. taught that sexual desire should be present in the woman as well as the man, placing importance in the magical rite on the female orgasm. Indeed, it criticised “the vast majority of civilized men” for their lack of endurance, claiming that “their love-passion is short and spasmodically ended before the female organism has had time to reciprocate the contact and she is thus deprived of all the fine and more acute sensations which constitute the sum total of Love’s Master Passion.”¹²¹ Furthermore, the teachings emphasised a woman’s right to bodily autonomy, the “Ansairetic Arcanum” asserting that “it is only the idiot who is brute enough to intrude his *lust by right* upon an unwilling wife.” However, it framed the consequences in terms of the negative impact on the husband’s feelings, stating that “the wise man will not go where he is not wanted, nor be so blindly foolish as to attend the funeral of his own joy” and “he becomes disgusted with her, whom his lust has turned into a *dead passive instrument*.”¹²²

Fourthly, and finally, the couple were not, under any circumstances, to use artificial methods of contraception, such as sheaths, caps or sponges; this was described as a “fearful crime.”¹²³ Rather, it was considered vital that “the neck of the uterus be bathed in and by the husband’s prostatic lymph and *ejected semen every time* they know each other.”¹²⁴ If this advice was not followed, again, dire consequences would result. In occult terms, the “vital germ-seeds,” the sperm, would become like “famished vampires,” separated from the Divine spark and instead “germinat[ing] within the odylic soul-sphere,” becoming “spiritual elementaries” or evil spirits.¹²⁵ However, again, there would also be implications for the couple’s relationship. Utilising the scientific terminology present throughout the teachings, unless the couple’s “mutual acids and alkalis”

121. *Ibid.*, 236.

122. *Ibid.*, 237.

123. *Ibid.*, 276.

124. *Ibid.*, 236-37.

125. *Ibid.*, 276.

immediately met, mingled, blended and fused, “the electro-magnetic and nervous conditions essential to the perfect union” would not be present and “mutual coolness, loathing and repulsion” would follow.¹²⁶ If they didn’t want children, however, they were permitted to restrict intercourse to the “*natural period*,” in which conception was believed to be impossible.¹²⁷

If these conditions were met, and if the couple concentrated on what they desired before, during and after sex, then the magic would work. The potential rewards were considerable, encompassing material wealth, longer life, youthful beauty, magical prowess, control over ones spouse and an intellectually superior child, although there is a contradiction in the text, it later stating that the only legitimate objects of “conjugal love” were marital harmony and “the evolution of powers in the unborn child.”¹²⁸ In addition, the couple could contact and converse with the “Potencies, Powers, and Intelligences” of the spirit world, deities whose intelligence was like the ocean compared to the dewdrop, and who were “the arbiters of the destinies of the worlds and the originators of the grand drama of external life.”¹²⁹

The “Mysteries of Eros” arguably contains what could be termed feminist elements, although framed in a way that diverges in significant ways from nineteenth-century campaigns for women’s rights. The reform of divorce law was an important feminist cause, with campaigners focusing on the overturning of the codification of the sexual double standard in the 1857 England and Wales Divorce Act. This dictated that a wife had to prove her husband’s cruelty, desertion, or bestiality, but that divorce was available to a husband on the

126. *Ibid.*, 237.

127. The so-called “safe period” of women’s menstrual cycle, during which they were unable to conceive, was only reliably established later in 1929, by Kyusaku Ogino of Japan and Hermann Knaus of Vienna. Hall, “Contraception.”

128. *Ibid.*, 241, 247. This accords with the circulation of two texts to American H. B. of L. members, Randolph’s original “Mysteries of Eulis,” containing a long list of occult powers, and an H. B. of L. authored “Brief Key to the Eulian Mysteries,” which restricted this power to “making an ideal child.” Bowen, “‘The Real Pure Yog’,” 163-64.

129. “The Mysteries of Eros,” in Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 230-31.

grounds of his wife's adultery alone. However, as Lucy Bland notes, within feminist networks, divorce itself was still considered scandalous, with the H. B. of L.'s advocacy of separation due to incompatibility more resonant of the era's Secularist movement.¹³⁰ Similarly, while a handful of feminists in the 1880s and 1890s asserted women's right to sexual pleasure, such as the Edinburgh Malthusian and freethinker Jane Hume Clapperton, sex was not discussed openly within the British women's rights movement until 1911-12, in the pages of Dora Marsden's *Freewoman* periodical.¹³¹ Most focused in this earlier period on the egregious impact of male sexual behaviour on women. Relatedly, the Brotherhood's assertion of women's right to bodily autonomy can be seen to superficially align with feminist critiques of the legal non-recognition of marital rape, suffrage campaigner Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy stating in 1898 that "the wife ... is in a different position from any other woman, for *she has no right or power to refuse* consent; anything more infamously degrading it is impossible to conceive."¹³² Yet, as was noted earlier, the focus of the H. B. of L.'s concerns over "an unwilling wife," was not on her degradation but on her husband's resulting "disgust" with her passivity and his absence of "joy."¹³³

In fact, in many ways, the H. B. of L.'s magical practices upheld normative gendered and sexual attitudes and structures. The organisation remained male-led and within Europe at least, initiates appear to have been predominantly men, although more women seemingly joined in America.¹³⁴ On a personal level, there is no evidence that Davidson's wife Christina was actively involved in the organisation. Also, while male and female elements were accorded equal weight in the quest for spiritual androgyny, women were perceived predominantly

130. Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 134.

131. On Jane Hume Clapperton and feminist views on women's sexual pleasure, see Cheadle, *Sexual Progressives*, 177-82.

132. Ignota, "Judicial Sex Bias," *Westminster Review*, July 1909, quoted in Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 135.

133. "The Mysteries of Eros," in Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 237.

134. Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 3.

as sanctified mothers, and accorded the arguably lesser qualities of passivism and affection, in contrast to men’s active will and creativity. Furthermore, sex magic was recommended strictly for heterosexual, married couples, with no hint of Crowley’s later queer practices or his critique of the bourgeois family.¹³⁵ Similarly, female passion, while acknowledged, was far removed from the promiscuity of the “femme fatale,” a figure Manon Hedenborg White argues was significant for Crowley as “a gateway to the numinous, albeit terrifying experience of the erotic destruction of the rational masculine ego.”¹³⁶ The masculine ego, in the H. B. of L., was to remain safely intact and bounded, despite female passion and the transcendental potential of sex.

H. B. of L. discourse also upheld other hierarchies: of class, race and sexuality. The *Occult Magazine* was written explicitly for the “thinking classes,” Davidson musing on the likely devastation that would result should the order’s secret knowledge be learned by “the undeserving or criminal . . . the multitudes who teem in the lowest quarters of European cities, where crime stalks unmolested in broad daylight.”¹³⁷ In terms of race, the periodical did contain a criticism of Britain’s imperial wars, and of the Christian justification for them, exclaiming in relation to the Sudan campaign of 1881–99, “We find it a matter of the utmost difficulty to comprehend how people can actually *offer thanksgivings* for their own successes in blowing hundreds and thousands of Arabs to pieces, with scientific murdering machines.”¹³⁸ However, particularly when critiquing theosophy, it replicated racist views of “Orientals” as physically indolent, intellectual inert and sexually lascivious.¹³⁹

In this way, the ideal of occult manhood constructed and disseminated by the H. B. of L., in its public and private aspects, can be seen as an example of “hybrid masculinity.” However, as with the norms of the scholar and the priest, the form

135. For Crowley’s queer sexual practices see Dixon, this journal issue; Hedenborg White, *The Eloquent Blood*, 35–80; Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 186–220.

136. White, *The Eloquent Blood*, 49.

137. *Occult Magazine* 1, February 1885; *Occult Magazine* 3, April 1885.

138. “General Items,” *Occult Magazine* 3, April 1885, 22.

139. “The Origin and Object of the HBL” and “The Ansaitic Arcanum [Grade I, Second Degree],” in “The Mysteries of Eros,” Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 93, 239.

“hybridisation” took differed to that originally delineated by Demetriou, of the appropriation of qualities from gay, Black and working-class masculinity. Instead, the Brotherhood reconfigured the masculine ideal in two ways. Firstly, it co-opted feminist-aligned policies, drawn primarily from Randolph’s work, including a reform of divorce law, an acknowledgement of female sexual pleasure, and women’s right to bodily autonomy. Yet as Demetriou states, “When a signifier or a practice passes from one group to another, it never retains its previous meaning or function. It is transformed, rearranged, adapted, and translated into a new context.”¹⁴⁰ The H. B. of L., in rearticulating women’s rights issues, transformed them into something less feminist and more male-centred, while in their wider discourse the organisation continued to perpetuate social inequalities of race, class and sexuality and offered no real challenge to patriarchy. As Brian Donovan states, “softer’ forms of masculinity are not inherently emancipatory for women, and can, in fact, mask usurpation of women’s rights.”¹⁴¹

Secondly, the Brotherhood borrowed from another masculine ideal, that of the “man of science.” The complex dialogue between the domains of science and esotericism, their own boundaries indeterminate and protean, has been traced by numerous scholars of the occult revival, with foci including the claims of physical scientists to interpretive authority on psychical phenomena; the role played by mesmerism in debates over scientific legitimacy and methodology; and the continued purchase of spiritual as well as sexological knowledge in the formation of sexually deviant subjectivities.¹⁴² However, the evidence from the H. B. of L. reveals another entanglement between the two concerns, namely the deployment of science as a means to re-masculinise the occult male, in danger of being construed as an effete and idiosyncratic if respectable “crank.” As Heather

140. Demetriou, “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity,” 352.

141. Donovan, “Political Consequences of Private Authority,” 837.

142. Noakes, *Physics and Psychics*; Winter, *Mesmerized*; Dixon, “Sexology and the Occult.” See also, Asprey, *The Problem of Disenchantment*; Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith*; Oppenheim, *The Other World*; Treital, *A Science for the Soul*.

Ellis has demonstrated, the scientific masculine ideal had already undergone a process of reconfiguration, in its quest for cultural legitimacy and power.¹⁴³ Rejecting earlier models of the gentleman amateur and reclusive scholar, by the 1860s and 1870s, members of influential, all-male scientific coterie such as the Red Lions and the X-Club, instead promoted an image of the (male) scientist as an active experimenter, applying his knowledge to the practical problems of modern life. The strategy appeared to work with, as early as 1846, science being linked to the unequivocally manly arena of imperialism, and Charles Kingsley, the primary advocate for “muscular Christianity,” arguing “that practically oriented instruction in science was the perfect method for training the manly heroes of the empire.”¹⁴⁴ What worked for science could work equally well for occultism. The H. B. of L.’s emphasis on practical magic, its representation of it as “occult science,” its use of scientific vocabulary, and its claims to knowledge of secret yet none-the-less objectively verifiable “laws of Matter and Force,” can be read as an attempt to redraw occult masculinity along scientific lines.¹⁴⁵

“A Thorough Deep-Dyed Scoundrel”: Thomas Burgoyne, Class and Criminality

In 1886, after just two years of public operation, and despite Davidson’s assiduous attempts to keep the teachings on sex magic private, the H. B. of L. was hit by scandal. Tellingly, however, it was not sex but an exposure of criminality that precipitated the society’s disintegration, at least in its British iteration. The previous year, in the October 1885 issue of the *Occult Magazine*, Davidson had proposed a new scheme for an H. B. of L. colony in America, comparable to John Humphrey Noyes’s Perfectionist community at Oneida, New York and Thomas Lake Harris’s colony at Santa Rosa, California. Its aim, stated Davidson, was to provide a “home in the West” to our “downtrodden

143. Ellis, *Masculinity and Science*, 117-48.

144. *Ibid.*, 140.

145. Letter from “Author of the ‘Divine Church,’” *Elgin Courant*, 15 April 1884.

but industrious brothers—the sons of toil.”¹⁴⁶ An appeal was made to the organisation’s “wealthy friends” to support the scheme by purchasing land, asserting that it was necessary to contribute “manfully your share of the world’s wealth, if you wish to be a disciple in the world’s work.”¹⁴⁷ Discussions on the scheme’s relative merits continued in subsequent issues, with plans voiced for members to go out to America in early Spring.¹⁴⁸ In March 1886, a prospectus was circulated, offering investors the chance to buy 4,000 shares of £5 each in the “Hermetic Colony Association,” in a bid to raise £20,000 of capital.¹⁴⁹ The Rev. William Ayton, the H. B. of L.’s “Provincial Grand Master for the South,” was erroneously listed as one of six directors without his permission. As a consequence, he started investigating the Brotherhood’s operations, writing in a letter to a friend of Blavatsky, “I have for some time been sure that there was something wrong in the HB of L and have taken great pains to find the clue.”¹⁵⁰ His detective work produced dramatic results. He discovered that Burgoyne was in fact a man he knew as “D’Alton,” and that when he had met him, he had “made such a confession of Black Magic” that Ayton had rejected him as being “impossible.”¹⁵¹ More seriously, four years ago, Dalton had been convicted of fraud and served seven months in Armley Prison in Leeds.

Born 14 April 1855 in Douglas on the Isle of Man, Dalton was the son of a surgeon, and so ostensibly middle class.¹⁵² However, by the time of his public involvement with the H. B. of L., he was working as a grocer in Bradford

146. “A Proposed Colony of the H. B. of L.,” *Occult Magazine* 9, October 1885.

147. *Ibid.*

148. “The Proposed Colony,” *Occult Magazine* 12, January 1886.

149. Prospectus for “The Hermetic Colony Association,” GD 2/5/4/2, Library and Museum of Freemasonry.

150. Extract of letter from Ayton to Countess Wachtmeister, reprinted in Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 346.

151. Letter from Rev. William Alexander Ayton to Captain Francis G. Irwin, 29 December 1890, reprinted in Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 353.

152. 1881 Census; baptismal record, Thomas Henry D’Alton, b. 14 April 1855, Parish of Lancaster, St. Mary’s.

and married with two children.¹⁵³ In 1882, with his brother-in-law John Thomas Prince, he had placed an advert for a grocer's assistant in a local newspaper. When applicants replied, Dalton and Prince sent each of them a letter informing them that they had been selected and that they should forward 2s and 6d to "defray the cost of his being successful."¹⁵⁴ When arrested, Dalton stated to the police officer that "they would not have done it if they had not been hard-up."¹⁵⁵

When the details of the fraud became widely known, Britain's occult networks moved quickly to disassociate themselves from the H. B. of L., the *Theosophist* warning its readers against the organisation, which they described as a "catchpenny affair, promoted by disreputable persons for private gain."¹⁵⁶ Davidson appeared unrepentant, making light of the matter when Ayton raised it in person, and hitting back in the *Occult Magazine* at the "childish enemies who have so zealously and maliciously abused and vilified us to their heart's content."¹⁵⁷ As in the 1884 debate in the *Elgin Courant*, when Davidson defended his morality to his Kirk-going neighbours while secretly teaching sex magic by correspondence to Europe's occultists, Davidson demonstrated his ability to perform differing masculine identities dependent upon the particular cultural circuit within which he was situated. In his esoteric periodical, he railed against the undeserving criminal masses of European cities, yet in his personal relationship with Burgoyne, framed perhaps by a shared experience of poverty, he was more sanguine, finding no difficulty in working with a convicted fraudster. As Dawson states, "the achievement of an absolutely unified and coherent gendered social identity, for masculinity as well as femininity, is an impossibility."¹⁵⁸

153. 1881 Census.

154. "An Advertising Swindle in Leeds," *York Herald*, 31 October 1882.

155. "An Advertisement Fraud in Leeds," *Leeds Mercury*, 10 January 1883, reprinted in Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 350.

156. *The Theosophist*, Supplement, June 1886, cxxxiv, reprinted in Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 356.

157. Letter from Rev. William Alexander Ayton to Captain Francis G. Irwin, 29 December 1890, reprinted in Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 353; *Occult Magazine* 17, June 1886.

158. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 23-24.

While Burgoyne was dismissed as a “thorough deep-dyed scoundrel,” Davidson retained the respect of many of his occult contacts.¹⁵⁹ However, propelled perhaps in part by the general opprobrium, he put his plans for emigration into action, in May 1886 leaving Alves for America on board the SS Manitoba, accompanied by his wife Christina, their three youngest children and Burgoyne.¹⁶⁰ The two men parted company shortly afterwards, Burgoyne settling in Monterey, California and Davidson in White County, Virginia. There, Davidson published the *Morning Star* and *Mountain Musings*, journals of occultism and Christianity respectively, working as a homeopathist and herbal physician before his death in 1915 aged seventy-seven.¹⁶¹

Davidson’s occult work in America and the full legacy of the H. B. of L. are outwith the parameters of this article. However, the influence of the Brotherhood’s system of sex magic can be traced in the teachings of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light in America in 1895 and from there to Theodor Reuss’s *Ordo Templi Orientis* and to Aleister Crowley.¹⁶² More pertinent here is the influence the Brotherhood exacted on occult masculinity. In 1888, Blavatsky opened the Esoteric School of the Theosophical Society to provide instruction in practical occultism. Joscelyn Godwin, Christian Chanel and John Deveney interpret this as a direct response to the competition provided by the H. B. of L.¹⁶³ The Brotherhood’s practical and “progressive” occult man can therefore be seen as formative in shaping masculine identity within the cultural circuit of British occultism during the 1880s and 1890s. Its features would shift again after 1900 however, as the conditions for the

159. Letter from Rev. William Alexander Ayton to Captain Francis G. Irwin, 29 December 1890, reprinted in Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 354.

160. Pennsylvania, US, Arriving Passenger and Crew List, 1800-1962, Steamship Manitoba, Glasgow to Philadelphia, 5 May 1886. Accessed 15 February 2022, Ancestry.com.

161. Photograph of Peter Davidson’s gravestone, Mount Pleasant Methodist Church Cemetery, Cleveland, White County, Georgia, USA, Find A Grave Memorial ID 72216185, accessed 17 February 2022, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/72216185/peter-davidson>.

162. Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 67.

163. *Ibid.*, 7, 62. For further details of the Esoteric School, see Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, 45.

defence of its hegemony changed, with the arrival of Annie Besant as president of the Theosophical Society, an increasingly female membership and a new emphasis on “feminine” forms of spiritual activity.¹⁶⁴

Conclusion

Despite the “gentleman’s club” ambiance of British occultism during the late-Victorian period, the ideal of the “occult man” rested on unstable foundations. An emphasis on scholarly erudition, exacerbated by an entrenched association between spiritual affinity and feminine passivity, threatened a legitimacy already rendered tenuous by esotericism’s marginalised position within the debates of the period’s “crisis of faith.” The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor buttressed the masculine ideal at a critical juncture. Nine years after the founding of the Theosophical Society, yet four years before the opening of its Esoteric School and the arrival of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, it reconfigured the masculine ideal, centring it on practical occultism. As well as drawing on the model of the “man of science” as an active hero of the Empire, in its sexual rites it co-opted the feminist-aligned causes of divorce advocacy, female sexual pleasure and women’s bodily autonomy. Yet it did so in a way that transformed their original meaning, shifting the focus away from women, while in its public discourse, the organisation upheld structural inequalities of class, race and sex.

Davidson was instrumental in this shift. An interloper in an international network of primarily urban-dwelling, bourgeois professionals, his upbringing among the modest farmers and tradespeople of Northeast Scotland provided him with a different perspective. This would cause him to react less judgmentally when Burgoyne’s past criminality came to light; it also provided him with different lessons on manhood, due to his participation in local cultural circuits. In the Catholic seminary in Aberdeenshire, he benefitted from understandings of male spiritual authority, while in the parish school in Banffshire, he was aided by the stereotype of the humble yet talented “lad o’ pairts.” Other masculine

164. Besant, *Divine Feminine*, 67–68.

identities had national resonance, such as the breadwinning provider and domestic patriarch, while the combined masculine repertoire enabled him to reap a patriarchal dividend. In Davidson’s case, this included the time and money to pursue his esoteric studies and the erudition and white-collar employment to pass as a man of standing, among both his occult correspondents and his Presbyterian community. Retaining this public status was dependent however, on Davidson’s strict policing of the public-private boundary in the H. B. of L.’s operation. If his publication of a theosophical pamphlet caused an impassioned and extended debate on his character in the *Elgin Courant*, one can only guess at the response from his Presbyterian neighbours if his teachings on sex magic had been revealed.

Scandal, when it came to the organisation, exposed fissures within fin-de-siècle occultism not over sexual deviance but class. Despite Burgoyne’s middle-class upbringing, a combination of his subsequent poverty, a conviction for fraud, and a degree of deliberate dissembling in terms of his identity, led to his condemnation as a scoundrel and his expulsion from British networks. While disseminating transgressive ideas on the transcendental potential of sex magic was tacitly permitted in the “gentleman’s private club” of early British occultism, criminality with its working-class associations was not.

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