

# Gnostic Counter Cultures

Gnosticism, Esotericism, Mysticism

Rice University  
Department of Religion

GEM COLLECTIVE Conference

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Members of this congress explore the Gnostic in Western culture from the ancient world to the modern New Age, tracing the emergence, persistence, and disappearance of metaphysical religious currents that are perceived to be countercultural, inverted, transgressive and/or subversive in their relationship to normative religion and their claim to knowledge. The main purpose of this interdisciplinary conference is to unlock the Gnostic from its cage in the ancient world and to challenge the prevailing academic opinion that the Gnostic is a useless category because it reifies as heretics people who were simply “alternative” devout Christians.

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Sponsored by the Rockwell Fund

March 26 – March 28, 2015  
Kyle Morrow Room, Fondren Library  
Rice University

April D. DeConick

Grant Adamson

Dylan M. Burns

John D. Turner

Zeke Mazur

Gregory Shaw

Michael Kaler

Fritz Graf

Kocku von Stuckrad

M. David Litwa

Lautaro Roig Lanzillota

Mark Gregory Pegg

Victoria Nelson

Erik Davis

Mark Pilkington

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

Matthew J. Dillon

Sarah Iles Johnston

Brent Landau

Stephen C. Finley

Margarita Simon Guillory

Jeffrey J Kripal

**Gnostic Counter Cultures**  
**GEM Collective Conference**  
Department of Religion, Rice University

Friday, March 27

**Thursday, March 26**

**3:00** Rice shuttle pick up

**4:00** Welcome, APRIL D. DeCONICK and JEFFREY J. KRIPAL

**Session 1: The Beginnings of Gnosticism**

Presider, MICHAEL DOMERACKI

**4:15-4:40** APRIL D. DeCONICK

The Ancient New Age and the Revolution of Religion

*DeConick offers a way to think about gnosticism as the rise of an innovative form of spirituality in the ancient world, a transgressive metaphysics that could be linked to a variety of religious affiliations (like Fundamentalism is today). Gnostic spirituality in antiquity is associated with four ideal characteristics framed around the concept of gnosis, or the direct experiential knowledge of a transcendent God. This countercultural spirituality survives today on the shoulders of three great Gnostic Awakenings that re-circulated old Gnostic artifacts, not to mention ecstatic experiences of transcendence which continue to sponsor the gnostic.*

**4:40-5:05** GRANT ADAMSON

“I Turned Away From the Temple”: Sethian Counterculture in the Apocryphon of John

*The Gnostic authors of the Apocryphon of John and its related Sethian texts demonized and vilified the creator, which shocked their opponents, not only their fellow Jews and Christians but also Greek philosophers. Their opponents thought that this demonization and vilification of the maker of heaven and earth was sinfully heretical, impious, and blasphemous. Modern scholarship does not have to side with Irenaeus and Origen, Celsus and Plotinus, in thinking so. But that doesn't mean it wasn't sociologically transgressive or countercultural of the Gnostic authors of the apocryphon to depict the biblical and Platonic creator as an ignorant, boastful, and jealous apostate. It was.*

**5:05-5:30** DYLAN M. BURNS

Archon-Seduction, Demon Sex, and Sodomites

*Scholarship has of late sought to “domesticate” Gnosticism, properly situating “Gnostic” literature in the greater world of early Christianity rather than consigning it to the periphery, as a delinquent amongst the ancient Christian schools of thought. Yet not all Gnostic texts are so easy to tame; the Paraphrase of Shem (Nag Hammadi Codex VII,1), for instance, is a work replete with seemingly obscene material—ranging from the seduction of a delinquent womb to a demonic sex scene and valorization of the Sodomites—and thus has much to tell us about the role of transgression (or lack thereof) in Gnostic thought...if we dare to read it. This paper will address these shocking passages, contextualizing them in light of other evidence pertaining to sexualized Gnostic myths, particularly those associated by Epiphanius with the “Borborites”—the “Libertine Gnostics” par excellence.*

**5:30 – 5:45** Discussion

**6:30** Shuttle to hotel

**7:45** Shuttle pick up

**8:30 – 9:00** Continental Breakfast

**Session 2: Gnosticism and Neo-Platoism**

Presider, SRAVANA BORKATAKY-VARMA

**9:00 – 9:25** JOHN D. TURNER

Transgressing Boundaries: Plotinus and the Gnostics?

*An examination of instances of Plotinus' critique in the first ten chapters of Ennead II.9, “Against the Gnostics,” regarding doctrines reflected in the Sethian Platonizing treatises and the Valentinian Tripartite Tractate insofar they may be appropriately considered as transgressions of Platonic metaphysics and of traditional principles of philosophical hermeneutics and etiquette that may or may not merit the designation “countercultural.”*

**9:25 – 9:50** ZEKE MAZUR

Forbidden Knowledge: Cognitive Transgression and Ascent Above the Intellect

*Throughout Ennead II.9[33] Against the Gnostics, Plotinus repeatedly (and perhaps hypocritically) complains that his Gnostic friends claim to possess an extraordinary capability to undertake a contemplative or visionary ascent beyond the divine Intellect itself so as to attain the transcendent (and hypernoetic) deity: a claim which he considers the height of arrogance or hubris. This paper will examine the curiously transgressive theme of 'ascent above intellect' as it occurs in various Gnostic systems of the 2nd–3rd centuries CE, as well as in Plotinus himself, and trace the genesis of this notion to an (originally Gnostic) critical reflection on the inability of conventional academic philosophy to attain the Transcendent, a theme which (I would suggest) they ingeniously encrypted in the famous myth of Sophia's cognitive overreach and catastrophic failure.*

**9:50-10:15** GREGORY SHAW

*Demon est Deus Inversus: Honoring the D(a)emonic in Iamblichean Theurgy*  
*This essay aims to explore the non-dual aspect of Iamblichean theurgy in the challenging context of the embodied soul. How does one engage demonic impulses in oneself and in others without condemnation? How does one discover the god in the demon and evoke its presence? This essay will attempt to understand the principles of Iamblichean theurgy as a path to non-dual experience in the midst of embodied life.*

**10:15-10:30** Discussion

**10:30-10:45** Break

### Session 3: Defining Gnosticism

Presider, CLAIRE VILLARREAL

#### 10:45-11:10 MICHAEL KALER

Intuition, Nag Hammadi, and Foundation Stories: Yet another attempt to define g/Gnosticism

*In this paper, I will discuss the curious tendency that scholars have of using secondary sources (i.e., Irenaeus and other heresiologists) to define gnosticism, and using primary sources (most particularly the Nag Hammadi collection) as backups for definitions taken from the secondary sources. I will also suggest some ways in which gnosticism might look different if we started our definitional work with primary sources rather than secondary ones.*

#### 11:10-11:35 FRITZ GRAF

Gnosticism: Knowledge and Mysteries

*In Book 1 of Against Heresies, Irenaeus gives a few indications about rituals performed by 'gnostic' initiators. I try to understand their role and social position in the light of the professional initiators described by Plato and especially in col. 20 of the Derveni Papyrus that deals with "Orphic" (Bacchic?) initiators and the knowledge that can be gained during the ritual.*

#### 11:35-12:00 KOCKU von STUCKRAD

Ancient Gnosis and Identity Work in German Intellectual Discourse

*This lecture looks at the ancient world as a large imaginal space, which means that the ancient world is discursively linked to the world of its interpreters. A good example of this interaction is the term "Gnosis," which was introduced by twentieth-century scholars as an implicit antidote to what they perceived as the problems of rationalism and "modernity."*

#### 12:00-12:15 Discussion

#### 12:15-2:00 Lunch break

### Session 4: Histories of Gnosticism

Presider, C.J. SCHMIDT

#### 2:00-2:25 M. DAVID LITWA

Gnostic Self-Deification: Real Claim or Heresiological Construction?

*Self-deification is the ultimate transgression, since the self-deifier attempts to transcend human nature and even nature itself. This paper explores a middle path between viewing self-deification as either the heart of Gnostic soteriology or as merely a heresiological defamation.*

#### 2:25-2:50 LAUTARO ROIG LANZILLOTA

Man and Cosmos in Hermetic and Gnostic Lore: The Case of the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul

*It is well known that Nag Hammadi and Hermetic treatises tend to view the human being in the light of the cosmological framework. The present paper revisits the cosmology at work in the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul (NHC V,2) and provides a new interpretation both of its constituent elements and of its overall cosmological framework. I intend to show not only that cosmology and anthropology intrinsically intertwined, but also that ethics determines both the structure of the world and the character and evaluation of its different parts.*

#### 2:50-3:15 MARK GREGORY PEGG

The Paradigm of Catharism; or, the Historians' Illusion of Medieval Gnosticism

*Catharism is the most famous heresy of the Middle Ages, often assumed to be a form of medieval Gnosticism; unfortunately, it never existed, and like Late Antique Gnosticism, was largely an invention of nineteenth-century scholars. Until beginning of this century most scholars believed in the existence of the Cathars; indeed, many still do. As with Gnosticism, the debate about Catharism (in and out of the academy) reveals enduring problems about the very definition of religion, heresy, and what was (and is) a counterculture.*

#### 3:15-3:30 Discussion

### Session 5: Keynote Address

Presider, JEFFREY J. KRIPAL

#### 4:00-5:50 VICTORIA NELSON

23,000 Rays of Light Who Fell to Earth and Found Each Other: Gnostic Fiction and Gnostic Practice in Vladimir Sorokin's *Ice Trilogy*

*Drawing on the esoteric lore around the famous 1905 Tunguska comet event in Siberia, the noted Russian novelist Vladimir Sorokin's Ice trilogy is an apocalyptic fiction that ingeniously fuses Gnostic cosmology with real-life twentieth-century politics and history. Trapped in human bodies around the world, Sorokin's newly awakened 23,000 "rays of light" embark on a hundred-year quest to find each other and escape the hated prison of Earth forever. But the unholy means they use to achieve their ends raises the disturbing question: Was it their human nature that corrupted the Children of the Light—or their eternal one?*

#### 6:00 Shuttle to hotel

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## Saturday, March 28

#### 7:45 Shuttle pick up

#### 8:00 – 8:30 Continental Breakfast

### Session 6: Gnostic Stories 1

Presider, ERIN PROPHET

#### 9:00 – 9:25 ERIK DAVIS

Stranger in a Strange Land: Philip K. Dick's Gnostic Identity

*Following a string of extraordinary otherworldly experiences in 1974, the science fiction writer Philip K. Dick restlessly explored different philosophical and religious identities, including "Christian" and "Gnostic". As part of a project to understand how Gnosticism came to serve as a "countercultural" alternative to mainline Christianity, I will explore how Dick understood and constructed these two rival but overlapping positions.*

**9:25 – 9:50 MARK PILKINGTON**

**Extraterrestrial Gnosis: Shards in the Cosmic Mirror**

*During the mid to late 1990s, elements of the rich mythology surrounding extraterrestrial visitation and UFO encounters erupted, potently, into the American popular consciousness. At the same time, a deep gnostic undercurrent flowed into the lore, through writers including Whitley Strieber, Karla Turner, John Mack and Kenneth Ring. This current, it can be argued, reached its ultimate expression in the 39 members of the San Diego-based gnostic UFO group Heaven's Gate, who ascended to 'the next level above human' in March 1997. This presentation will examine some of the ways that gnostic ideas, merging spiritual and technological yearnings, manifested within UFO beliefs of the period.*

**9:50-10:15 WOUTER HANEGRAAFF**

**Alan Moore's Promethea, Counterculturalism and the End of the World**

*In this contribution I will discuss the Promethea mythos as developed in a five-volume comics cycle (1999-2005) published by the acclaimed comics writer Alan Moore in collaboration with J.H. Williams III and Mick Gray. Promethea is one of the most explicit esoteric comics ever published, and a major expression of radical gnostic counterculturalism in popular culture.*

**10:15-10:30 Discussion**

**10:30-10:45 Break**

**Session 7: Gnostic Stories 2**

Presider, BENJAMIN BROCHSTEIN

**10:45-11:10 MATTHEW J DILLON**

**Resurrecting the Gnostic Christ in Contemporary (Non-)Fiction**

*This paper analyzes the reception of the Nag Hammadi Library and affiliated 'Gnostic' texts in the life and work three authors: Grant Morrison, Laurence Caruana and Jonathan Talat Philips. It investigates how constructions of "Gnosticism" allowed these contemporaries to read themselves into the past through these texts, and how this hermeneutic engagement resulted in creative reinterpretations of the nature of Christ in their (non-)fiction.*

**11:10-11:35 SARAH ILES JOHNSTON**

**The Great God Pan**

*This paper will start by looking closely at Arthur Machen's The Great God Pan (1894) and some other stories by Machen, focusing on the form of 'gnosticism' that the story takes up and what it intends to say about the acquisition of hidden knowledge. It will proceed to look at later stories that were influenced by Machen, including H.P. Lovecraft's 'The Dunwich Horror' (1929) and the different ways in they present hidden knowledge and its acquisition*

**11:35-12:00 BRENT LANDAU**

**The Coming of the Star-Child: Revelation of the Magi in New Age Thought and UFOlogy**

*The ancient Christian text known as Revelation of the Magi presents itself as the first-person testimony of the Magi on the coming of Christ. Two of its most distinctive features are: 1) its presentation of Christ as the Magi's star, from which he transforms into a small, luminous human being; and 2) its belief that Christ is the source of all*

*of humanity's religious epiphanies. These two features have made the RevMagi an intriguing text for proponents of New Age religious thought and for students of the UFO phenomenon. This paper will examine such interpretations and assess whether their applications of such "modern" concerns to an ancient text are appropriate.*

**12:00-12:15 Discussion**

**12:15-2:00 Lunch break**

**Session 8: Gnostic Stories 3**

Presider, ERIN PROPHET

**2:00-2:25 STEPHEN C. FINLEY**

**African American Religion as Quintessential American Gnostic Religion: Theoretical and Methodological Reflections**

*This paper seeks to situate "African American Religion" as central to American Religion and as Gnostic. Subsequent to an exploration of how and why African American religion is both very "American" and simultaneously very gnostic, the paper will consider the implications of this position for the theoretical and methodological implications for the study of American religion.*

**2:25-2:50 MARGARITA SIMON GUILLORY**

**The Secret in the Sand: Louisianian Hoodoo Rituals**

*This paper considers the intersectional relationship between materiality and science in the study of religion. Specifically, it draws from Zora Neale Hurston's Hoodoo in America to examine the variety of ways that Louisianian hoodoo practitioners used the "magnetic" properties of sand to achieve ritual success.*

**2:50-3:15 JEFFREY J. KRIPAL**

**Biological Gods: The New Mythmakers of Science (Fiction)**

*This lecture will focus on three texts: Philip K. Dick's VALIS (1981), Whitley Strieber's COMMUNION (1987) and Barbara Ehrenreich's LIVING WITH A WILD GOD (2014). In each case, we will see how the author describes a deeply personal, life-changing encounter with what any earlier culture would have recognized as a deity or demon. Each author engages these earlier religious interpretations but finally moves outside of them to posit actual invisible species in the environment that interact with human beings at their own whims and for their own interests, perhaps, the authors speculate, to "feed off" of human emotion or to tame, domesticate or evolve us via sexual communion and interspecies symbiosis. The result is a new set of evolutionary panpsychisms, erotic vitalisms and biological polytheisms that pose a challenge to the reigning materialisms and projection theories of conventional science and the humanities.*

**3:15-3:30 Discussion**

**3:30-3:45 Closing Remarks, JEFFREY J. KRIPAL**

**4:15 Return to hotel**

**6:00 Pick up for banquet at El Meson Restaurant**

**9:00 Return to hotel**

## Gnostic Counter Cultures Participants

**Grant Adamson:** Grant Adamson (Ph.D., Rice 2014) is a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow in the Program in Writing and Communication at Rice University. He specializes in the study of New Testament and Early Christianity. With April D. DeConick, he is co-editor of *Histories of the Hidden God: Concealment and Revelation in Western Gnostic, Esoteric, and Mystical Traditions* (Durham: Acumen 2013).

**Dylan M. Burns:** Dylan M. Burns (Ph.D. Yale University 2011) is a Research Associate at Leipzig University, Institute of Egyptology. His research focuses on diverse aspects of ancient Gnosticism, Greek philosophy, and early Christianity. He serves as co-chair of the Society of Biblical Literature's section Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism, and is co-founder of the Network for the Study of Esotericism in Antiquity. He is author of *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2014). He is contributing editor to *Gnosticism, Platonism, and the Ancient World: Essays in Honor of John Turner* (Leiden: Brill 2013).

**Miguel Conner:** Miguel Conner is the host of Aeon Byte Gnostic Radio, a podcast bringing ancient mysteries to modern meaning for eight years, interviewing the best and brightest scholars and mystics in the fields of Gnosticism and modern Esoterica. He is also the author of *Voices of Gnosticism* (Bardic Press 2011), and the works of fiction *Stargazer* (2011), *The Executioner's Daughter* (2012), and *Heretic* (2012).

**Erik Davis:** Erik Davis (Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Religion, Rice University) specializes in the study of American culture, contemporary esotericism, and media theory. His most recent books are *Nomad Codes: Adventures in Modern Esoterica* (Yeti 2010) and the new edition of *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (North Atlantic 2015).

**April D. DeConick:** April D. DeConick (Ph.D. University of Michigan 1994) is the Chair of Department of Religion, and Isla Carroll and Percy E. Turner Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity, Rice University. She maintains a blog, [www.forbiddengospels.com](http://www.forbiddengospels.com), and is on the editorial board of *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies* monograph series (Leiden: Brill) and the journal *Vigiliae Christianae* (Leiden: Brill). She has authored and edited thirteen books, including *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says* (London: Continuum 2007) which is the first book to challenge the National Geographic "official" interpretation of a good Judas in the Gospel of Judas. She has taken part in a film that has been made about the controversy, "The Gospel of Judas," which was created as part of the CNN special TV series, "Finding Jesus" (2015). Her new book, *The Ancient New Age: How Gnostic Spirituality Revolutionized Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press) will be released next year.

**Matthew J. Dillon:** Matthew Dillon (Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Religion, Rice University) is the Vaughn Fellow (2014-2015). He specializes in the study of American religion and culture, psychology of religion, and comparative Gnosticism and esotericism. He is currently working on his dissertation, "The Gnostic Renaissance: The Nag Hammadi Library in American Religion and Culture."

**Stephen C. Finley:** Stephen C. Finley (Ph.D. Rice University 2009) is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and African American Studies and the Section Head in Religious Studies at Louisiana State University. He is co-editor of *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience: "There Is a Mystery"* (Leiden: Brill), and the author of *In and Out of This World: Material and Extraterrestrial Bodies in the Nation of Islam*. He is also an Executive Committee member of the Society for the Study of Black Religion.

**Fritz Graf:** Fritz Graf (Ph.D. Zürich 1971) is the Distinguished University Professor in Classics, The Ohio State University. He specializes in the study of Greek and Roman religions and Greek epigraphy. He is now the Director of the Center for Epigraphical Studies. His most recent works include *Apollo* (Routledge, 2009) and *Roman Festivals in the Greek East: From the Early Empire to the Middle Byzantine Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

**Margarita Simon Guillory:** Margarita Simon Guillory (Ph.D. Rice University 2011) is an Assistant Professor at the University of Rochester. Her research interests include American Spiritualism and identity construction in African American religion. Her co-edited volume (with Stephen Finley and Hugh Page, Jr.) *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience* was recently published with Brill.

**Wouter J. Hanegraaff:** Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Ph.D. University of Utrecht 1995) is Professor of History of Hermetic Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam. He specializes in the history of Western Esotericism, with primary focus on the period Renaissance-Present. Significant chairs include Member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences since 2006, President of the Dutch Association for the Study of Religion (2002-2006), and President of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (2005-2013). His most recent publications are *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012) and *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury Press 2013).

**Sarah Iles Johnston:** Sarah Iles Johnston (Ph.D. Cornell University 1987) is the Arts & Humanities Distinguished Professor of Religion and Professor of Classics at The Ohio State University. She specializes in Religions of the ancient Mediterranean, history of magic and witchcraft, and history of the ghost story. She is currently President of the American Society for the Study of Religion. Her most recent books are *Ancient Greek Divination* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2008); *Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece* (University of California Press 1999).

**Michael Kaler:** Michael Kaler (Ethnomusicology, York University 2014; Ph.D. Laval University, 2006) is currently a Lecturer at the University of Toronto-Mississauga. His work addresses a wide range of topics, including Christian heterodoxy in late antiquity, modern recreations of gnosticism, the rediscovery of open improvisation in Western popular and art music of the last fifty years, music and religion, and the Grateful Dead. His most recent book, *Flora Tells A Story: The Apocalypse of Paul and its Contexts*, is published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press. He has taught at the University of Toronto, McMaster University, and York University, and been an active part of the southern Ontario rock, folk and creative music scenes for the past several decades.

**Jeffrey J. Kripal:** Jeffrey J. Kripal (Ph.D. University of Chicago 1993) holds the J. Newton Rayzor Chair in Philosophy and Religious Thought at Rice University, where he chaired the Department of Religion for eight years and helped create the GEM Program, a doctoral concentration in the study of Gnosticism, Esotericism, and Mysticism that is the largest program of its kind in the world. He specializes in the comparative study and analysis of extreme religious states from the ancient world to today. He is the author of seven books, most recently *Comparing Religions: Coming to Terms* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2014) and *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal* (Chicago: University of Chicago 2011).

**Brent Landau:** Brent Landau (Th.D. Harvard University 2008) is a Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. His research specialization is early Christian apocryphal literature. He is currently co-chair of SBL Christian Apocrypha Program Unit. His recent books include *Revelation of the Magi: The Lost Tale of the Wise Men's Journey to Bethlehem* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010) and his forthcoming work as co-editor of *New Testament Apocrypha: More Noncanonical Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).

**Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta:** Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta (Th.D. University at Groningen 2004) is Associate Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Studies at the University of Groningen. His areas of expertise are Greek philosophy and literature, Christian apocrypha and Nag Hammadi writings. He is currently Co-editor in the *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha* (Leiden: Brill) and on the Board of Editors for the *Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha* series (Peeters). He is most recently the author of *Diccionario de Personajes del Nuevo Testamento* (2011) and editor of *Plutarch in the Religious and Philosophical Discourse of Late Antiquity* (2012) and *Greeks, Jews, and Christians: Historical, Religious and Philological Studies in Honor of Jesús Peláez del Rosal* (2013).

**M. David Litwa:** M. David Litwa (Ph.D. University of Virginia) is currently Lecturer of Classics at the University of Virginia. He specializes in ancient Mediterranean religions, early Judaism and Christianity, ancient Gnosticism, and deification. He is most recently the author of three books: *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology* (2012); *Becoming Divine: An Introduction to Deification in Western Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Academic Press 2013); and *Jesus Deus: The Early Christian Depiction of Jesus as a Mediterranean God* (Cascade 2014).

**Zeke Mazur:** Zeke Mazur (Ph.D. University of Chicago 2010) is currently a Post-Doctoral Fellow in the Philosophy Department at Université Laval (Québec City) where he is working on the annotations for the new Budé edition of Plotinus. Besides Plotinus, his interests include Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, and the intersection of rationality and ritual praxis in the academic philosophy of Late Antiquity.

**Victoria Nelson:** Victoria Nelson (M.A. in English, University of Toronto) is Graduate Faculty in the Goddard College MFAW program in creative writing and occasional Senior Lecturer in the U.C. Berkeley Rhetoric Department. Her most recent book, *Gothicka* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) won the 2012 American Association of Publishers award for scholarly excellence in literature. Its predecessor, *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) won

the Modern Language Association's 2002 Scaglione prize in comparative literary studies.

**Mark Gregory Pegg:** Mark Gregory Pegg (PhD, Princeton, 1997) is Professor of History at Washington University – Saint Louis. His specialization is Medieval religion and heresy. He is most recently the author of *A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom* (Oxford 2007) and *Beatrice's Last Smile: A History of the Medieval World 200-1500* (Oxford 2015).

**Mark Pilkington:** Mark Pilkington is the author of the book and documentary film "Mirage Men" and "Far Out: 101 Strange Tales from Science's Outer Edge." He has contributed to publications including *The Guardian*, *Fortean Times*, *The Anomalist*, *Frieze*, *The Wire*, *Sight and Sound*. Mark also runs *Strange Attractor Press*, an independent publishing house based in London.

**Gregory Shaw:** Gregory Shaw (Ph.D. University of Santa Barbara 1987) is Professor of Religious Studies at Stonehill College. His areas of specialization are Platonism and Neoplatonism, Theurgy, Hermetism, and Gnosticism. He is the author of *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press 1995; 2nd edition, with new Preface and Foreword, Angelico Press 2014).

**John D. Turner:** John D. Turner (Ph.D. Duke University 1970) is the Cotner Professor of Religious Studies and Charles J. Mach University Professor of Classics and History at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He specializes in the study of ancient Gnosticism, in particular the restoration, conservation, translation, and interpretation of the thirteen fourth century papyrus codices from Nag Hammadi, Egypt. He is author/editor of thirteen books, including *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition and Plato's Parmenides and its Heritage* (Québec: Les Presses de L'Université Laval), a contributor to the English- and French-language critical editions of seven of the Nag Hammadi texts, and to the forthcoming Budé edition of Plotinus' *Enneads* (V.5 and V.8).

**Kocku von Stuckrad:** Kocku von Stuckrad (Ph.D. University of Bremen 1999) is Professor of Religious Studies and currently the Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. He is President of the Dutch Association for the Study of Religion and co-chair of the Religion in Europe Group of the American Academy of Religion. His most recent monograph is *The Scientification of Religion: An Historical Study of Discursive Change, 1800-2000* (De Gruyter 2014).