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Fiction, Invention and Hyper-reality: From Popular Culture to Religion ed. by Carole M. Cusack and Pavol Kosnáč
(review)

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Nova Religio, Volume 22, Number 3, February 2019, pp. 148-150 (Review)



Published by University of California Press

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mysticism is portable” (10), but I am not as certain that magic—divination, evocation, invocation, and enchantment—are as concerned with the ascent of consciousness. Perhaps in what may be called high magic there is an interest in illumination, but that is not as common amongst practitioners. In other words, isn’t esoteric religion often turned to for very external or exoteric ends, most notably: money, love/desires, health or, simply, power over others or oneself?

Versluis concludes by looking forward to how the new “religion of science” will likely develop its own manifestation of Platonic Mysticism (131). In the end, mysticism is about the transcendence of subject and object and many of our more intriguing scientific concepts discuss non-locality, uncertainty, and emergence, so he just may be right about this bold claim of mysticism developing within science. If Arthur C. Clarke was correct in stating “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic,” we may eventually need to add “but also vindicates history’s great mystics.” Plato did claim that all learning is truly recollection and Versluis wants to restore Plato’s thought, so that by looking backward, we may not need to wait until that future day when the insights of science and mysticism might converge.

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Fiction, Invention and Hyper-reality: From Popular Culture to Religion. Edited by Carole M. Cusack and Pavol Kosnáč. Routledge, 2017. 300 pages. \$160.00 cloth; \$49.95 paper; ebook available.

While growing, the scholarly study of new religious movements that are based on fictional texts is still relatively new and controversial. Popular culture—film, fiction, graphic novels, and more—has played a significant role in offering social actors throughout the world extended sources from which to draw to create new spiritualities and religiosity. As a result, this has given scholars a fresh and exciting lens through which to theorize and critically engage the study of religion, especially vis-à-vis religion, law, and politics. *Fiction, Invention and Hyper-reality* explores some of these emerging new religious practices and alternative virtual spiritualities in detail and offers the reader a good primer on a variety of “invented” religions. The contributors to this four-part volume are made up of both academics and religious insiders. One gets a better feel for what so-called “fiction-based,” “invented,” and “hyper-real religions” are and what they look like in practice, as well as their fraught existential struggle for legitimacy.

The Routledge Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements aims to attract general readers as well as scholars and one can see evidence of this within the text. In Part One, the history,

rituals, and historicity of Tolkien's *Legendarium*, the Elven lineage, and their intersection with the internet are examined, specifically through two spiritual groups based on J. R. R. Tolkien's cosmology—Tie eldalieva and Ilsaunte Valion. Here Markus Davidsen argues that “narrative religion” in conjunction with the “thematization of textual veracity” is what makes Tolkien's literary mythology a usable repertoire for “real world spirituality” (29). Carole M. Cusack, in her intriguing analysis of *Otherkin* and *Therianthropy*, adds to this by saying that, “The development of film and television technologies . . . made available a vast array of cultural information on which modern individuals could draw in order to craft a personal identity” (43). Thus, fiction, film, and literature become the locus for identity, religiosity, and meaning in these new forms of religion and spirituality.

This is also demonstrated through the exegesis of personal narratives (see, for example, Venetia Robertson and Pavol Kosnáč) and the chapters written by religious insiders such as Oliver Benjamin, founder of the Church of the Latter-Day Dude, who talks about the “Relaxial Age” and religion as a “heuristic for holiness” (149–56). This too can be seen in digital contexts and forms of countercultural religiosity. Parts Three and Four closely examine the integration of “one's religious or spiritual journey with social action” (277). They shed light on the “institutional turn” within these new religious movements and their struggle for legitimacy elucidated by their “state of intellectual liminality” or “playful investment in religious forms” (196). This notion of play is further considered by David Robertson in “the Conspiracy” of the Church of SubGenius, wherein he explains that conspiracies can be satirical and sincere modes of performance and representation, yet at the same time be profoundly meaningful as a subversion of official narratives. Johanna J. M. Petsche, in her chapter on African-American ufology is also interested in the intersection of narrative, performance, and identity. Petsche further reveals the complex nature of “invented religions,” through her application of eschatological narratives from the Nation of Islam and the Nuwaubian Nation of Moors to well-known jazz musician Sun Ra's mythos.

The chapter on Kopimism also investigates digital spiritual subjectivities and the fine line between the satirical and the sincere. Piracy, activism, and anti-statism understood in this framework become explicit political and religious acts. William Bainbridge's concluding chapter takes the reader on a fascinating walk through three virtual worlds with Constance, a simulacrum of his deceased sister—specifically showing the “multiple dimensions of virtual revival of a deceased person by means of role-playing inside gameworlds” (227).

This book's goal is to serve as an introductory text on a variety of new religions and spiritualities, their worldview, and the complexity of their

ongoing fight for legitimacy. The contributors to *Fiction, Invention and Hyper-reality* successfully demonstrate that these “phenomena have real life consequences.”

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Scientology in Popular Culture: Influences and Struggles for Legitimacy. Edited by Stephen A. Kent and Susan Raine. Praeger, 2017. 373 pages. \$58.00 cloth; ebook available.

More academic work on Scientology and Scientologists has been published in the last ten years than in the preceding five decades combined. Prominent examples include James R. Lewis’ anthology *Scientology* (Oxford, 2009), Hugh B. Urban’s monograph *The Church of Scientology: A History of a New Religion* (Princeton, 2011), James R. Lewis and Kjersti Hellesøy’s edited *Handbook of Scientology* (Brill, 2017), and special issues of *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* (6, no. 1), *Numen* (63, no. 1), and *Nova Religio* (20, no. 4).

Coedited by Stephen A. Kent and Susan Raine, *Scientology in Popular Culture* is the latest anthology to appear on the scene. Rather than provide a history of Scientology or overview of the life of L. Ron Hubbard, Canadian sociologists Kent and Raine take a topical approach and focus on the reciprocal relationship between Scientology and manifestations of popular culture. This perspective is quite useful and allows for a springboard based on previous scholarship in the area, such as journal articles by James R. Lewis, Carole M. Cusack, and Bernard Doherty. The introduction, authored by Raine, acknowledges the ambiguous and diverse meanings of *popular culture* and establishes the book’s goal—to incorporate “a wide array of components and subcomponents of popular culture” (xi), including the manner in which Scientology has been depicted in the media and “Hubbard’s or Scientology’s *attempts* to gain entry into popular culture domains” (x). The anthology is humble in scope and Raine recognizes an abundance of open areas and hopes that “research continues to flourish in this fascinating area” (xxv).

The first chapter, from Raine, examines continuities between Hubbard’s science fiction career and Scientology’s space opera-inspired pursuit of empire, colonialism, and masculinity. Historian Hugh B. Urban deftly examines some of the origins of Scientology theology through Hubbard’s fiction and the creative process of writing itself, especially as displayed in *Typewriter in the Sky* (1940) and the “Ole Doc Methuselah” stories from *Astounding Science Fiction* (1947–1950). Stefano Bigliardi offers a superb analysis of *Battlefield Earth* (1982) and the *Mission Earth* “dekalogy” (1985–1987) through the lenses of knowledge, technology, and power. The philosopher and historian,