



## The Scarlet Letter

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### Chasing Egregors

By Paco Xander Nathan

Of all the myths ever told, of all the theologies ever defended, of all the agnostic deconstructions ever argued, it seems to me that at least one current flows in common: a mingling between the worlds of humans and the worlds of gods.

Whether the humans created the gods – or vice versa; whether the gods were being invoked, evoked, collected, commanded, banished, seduced, or proselytized – or vice versa; whether the speaker believed ardently in the numinous – or believed ardently in the disbelief thereof...some characteristics almost certainly hold true. A conjunction of the realm of gonads with the realm of monads seems destined to produce a dynamic profusion of words, emotions, and polarities.

Now what I find interesting, in the context of operative mageia, is the ability to engineer those dynamics. A little over a dozen years ago, I encountered a most intriguing and powerful Hermetic formalism in the notion of an “egregor.”<sup>1</sup>



To contextualize using Thelemic terms, this word describes the process of developing a magical link. In a Platonic sense, egregors are dynamic structures used for perpetuating belief systems. They provide intellectual frameworks for constructing and deconstructing the beliefs that arise from group dynamics, i.e., the autopoietic emergence of an additional “individual” to represent a group of individuals.<sup>2</sup> In the spirit of Vitruvius, think of egregors as the allegorical buildings of the allegorical stonemasons of Western Esoteric Tradition.

What an amazing technology to study and practice! Unfortunately, the esoteric texts that one tends to find on bookstore shelves offer little in the way of footnotes or (oh, the horror!) primary sources. Apparently, that would transgress some secret law of occult writing. From what other writerly friends have rumored, clearly articulated references actually violate the editorial policy for at least one imprint, i.e., the one with the funny crescent satellite. In any case, when I wanted to delve further into the mysteries of how to build/grow/envision egregors, my

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quest lead mostly to a chain of vague paragraphs.

Now admittedly I am not much of a Crowley scholar, so for those who prefer a stricter Thelemic interpretation of a magickal link, please consider this as supplemental reading. Certainly, Thelema stands as a clear example of a particularly dynamic and well-considered egregor. That fact notwithstanding, my piqued interest in the philosophical technology for structuring belief systems desired foundations somewhat older than the Golden Dawn, Fraternitas Saturni, the alleged Secret Chiefs, the conspiratorial Secret Chief Execs, or whatever you wish to label Victorian-era esoteric phenomena. To wit, did the concept have any usage among Renaissance alchemists? If so, what were they thinking? Did they, in turn, inherit the concept from classical or ancient works? Also, what about the theory and praxis for developing egregors?

Searching online, the word egregor gets tossed about and defined reasonably well within the archives of Chaos Magic. Ostensibly, a practical and agile familiarity with servitors, sigils, egregors, etc., thrives at the very heart of Chaosist praxis. However, when pressed for details and citations, those wacky, octarine denizens of operation mindfuck inevitably reply with “Oh, I dunno... somebody probably just made shit up, probably somebody like Carroll or Spare.” Praxis is the key here, in any case, and one must give the Chaos crew their due. Phil Hine’s A5E site and the ChaosMatrix archives offer exceptionally delectable resources:

[http://www.phhine.ndirect.co.uk/archives/ess\\_egregore.htm](http://www.phhine.ndirect.co.uk/archives/ess_egregore.htm)

<http://www.chaosmatrix.com/lib/chaos/sseg.shtml>

Delving further, I have encountered others researching the term egregor – in Israel, France, and elsewhere. For example, a schoolteacher in Israel named Liona Sara Bernstein wrote an excellent essay on the topic for the online journal *Mystae* in 1998:

<http://www.fireplug.net/~rshand/streams/scripts/egregor.html>

Bernstein sorted through the flotsam of 20th century occultnik babble, finding the word used in conjunction with the euphemism “Watchers”. She traced that reference back to a related pre-Golden Dawn use by Eliphas Levi, eventually finding egeiro (translated: “to be awake”, “to watch”) in Greek-English lexicons which listed biblical origins for the term. That link, however, proved difficult to establish.

Fortunately, Bernstein enjoys a bit more facility with Hebrew and Greek than, say, most folks whom I see at dinner parties. Her research of Lamentations 4:14 and Daniel 4:10 led to an interesting conclusion that some minor transcription error may have occurred in biblical translations over the centuries, obscuring the term’s origins:

“Thus, the mystery is solved. An egregor is an angel, sometimes called watcher; in Hebrew the word is ir, and the concept appears in *The Book of Enoch*, edited by Charles (that would be 1 Enoch).”

Bernstein’s investigation picked up another thread in the text of *Liber Loagaeth* and the history of Dr. John Dee, pegging the early use of egregor in *Western Esoteric Tradition* via the ninth century *Chronography of Syncellus*. This work would be only a few centuries removed from the early Gnostics and the heyday of

Alexandria. One assumes that the good doctor likely got his paws on a copy, perhaps while wandering about in Poland.

Overall, the Bernstein article provides a highly recommended reference and an entertaining read. That answers part of my question. As an aside, the term *egregor* also appears in 20th century Russian mysticism, notably within the beautifully intricate prose of *The Rose Of The World* by Daniil Andreev:

“These entities of a non-material nature emerge from the psychic essence of great collectives.”

His teachings resound with a decidedly Gnostic tone, depicting a multitude of layered, subjective realms populated by the idealized, daimonic projections of earthbound counterparts. I am especially drawn to the notion that the heroes of our popular fiction – according to Andreev’s cosmology – spring from the realm of Daimons.<sup>3</sup> From what little I have been able to read about his work, my impression is that Andreev may have drawn from Greek sources, and perhaps represents a parallel development of the term *egregor*. That seems like a fine area for subsequent study.

Throughout the Egyptian, Judaic, and Indo-European traditions, there exists a concept of a Word used for creation, and hence its letters represent the elements<sup>4</sup> for a magical operation of creation. Ostensibly, this concept would apply to the operation of creating belief systems, as well?

Jumping back to a time just prior to the Renaissance, the West regained a variety of texts from Hellenized Egypt, known collectively as the *Corpus Hermeticum*. These included a jewel called *Tabula Smaragdina*, also known as *The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistis*. The fourth through sixth statements in that writing describe an important process:

*Pater eius est sol; mater eius est luna. Portavit illud ventus in ventre suo; nutrix eius terra est. Pater omnis telesmi totius mundi est hic.*

Translated: “Its father is the Sun. Its mother is the Moon. The wind carried it in its belly. Its nurse is the Earth. This is the father of all works of wonder in the world.” Rawn Clark delivers an interesting Kabbalistic analysis of the Emerald Tablet in the vast and treasureful Alchemy web site:

[http://www.levity.com/alchemy/rawn\\_cla.html](http://www.levity.com/alchemy/rawn_cla.html)

His analysis builds upon the rubric of YHVH – the Hebrew “Name Of God”, or tetragrammaton<sup>5</sup> – applied in a Hellenic<sup>6</sup> magical context. To paraphrase Clark concerning the fourth through sixth statements:

- Yod (Fire) symbolizes a creative intent, which seeks expression in Form.
- The initial Hé (Water) represents the continuous movement of energy down the scale of vibration, expressing itself through ever denser manifestation.
- Vau (Air) represents their synthesis, seeking downward expression, i.e., “Adept’s consciousness.”
- The final Hé (Earth) represents the manifest, the Individual Self, that which is expressed within a physical body.

- Shin (Spirit) represents the conscious awareness of the creator, which together with the other four results in the creation of independent life.

Note that YHVH is the most frequent god-name used throughout the Corpus Hermeticum, and is arguably used as a formula for ceremonial magic – especially in a Gnostic context,<sup>7</sup> considering the translated IAO – more than as an alleged deity. That cuts to the heart of what I would call an egregor.

Similarly, based on the ideographic forms of early Semitic,<sup>8</sup> the letters of the tetragrammaton translate to:

- “hand”
- “window”
- “hook”
- “window”

Note that the insertion of a shin (meaning “teeth”) into the formula is a process that becomes echoed throughout a variety of esoteric and religious texts.<sup>9</sup> This represents, accordingly, the “fifth essence” or “fifth element” of Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

Also, the “hand of god” reaching through the clouds appears as a common theme in many of the Major Arcana. Not that I am reaching for straws here, nor attempting to construct a conspiracy theory; rather, the symbols associated with the theory of egregors resonate throughout the traditions and organizations which apply them, in quite a fitting and essential manner.

It strikes me that the figurative meaning of YHVH needs to be recontextualized circa the cultural milieu of Hellenized Egypt, that most likely the exodermic layers of Judeo-Christian “reverence” and literality obscure the tetragrammaton’s operative use and origins in earlier Egyptian praxis. In the very least, that commentary would provide an entertaining exercise in practical blasphemy. Unfortunately, my grasp of Arabic is poor, and I have no background in Hebrew whatsoever, but from my limited exposure to Semitic linguistics, I might venture the following interpretation for the tetragrammaton *vis-à-vis* egregors:

The construction of a god-form given by the hand of god reaching through a window into a lower world (the world of angels/daemons), giving teeth to (enlivening) the egregor, and thus providing a hook through a window into a lower world (the world of men).

The original text in which I encountered the term egregor was in *The Tarot: A Contemporary Course Of The Quintessence Of Hermetic Occultism* by Mouni Sadhu. His discussion is the most extensive I have ever found – providing that a reader can endure prose as flowery and overblown as the title, while scraping off sedimentary layers of Theosophy.<sup>11</sup>

I visited the Theosophical Society in Melbourne in 1989 to inquire further, and learned about the author’s unfortunate self-immolation, allegedly in response to unrequited teen lust – at least according to the Society’s librarian on site; I sensed a hint of psychic war in the aethers. Mouni was one class-act weirdo, to be certain, but he wrote some amazing texts. May the seeker be lucky enough to locate them through a used bookstore.

Within the pages of *The Tarot*, Sadhu invokes a virtual spaghetti plate of Kabbalistic analysis to elaborate on what he calls “Egregoric Principles: A Plan of Religious Current”. That essay<sup>12</sup> discusses “currents” and the “formation of a magick chain,” also called a collective tourbillon.<sup>13</sup> This representation calls back to theurgy as described by Plotinus,<sup>14</sup> i.e., operations that depend on the “sympathy of enchained forces.”

Sadhu draws an intriguing set of correspondences between the steps in the process for creating an egregor and the letters in the tetragrammaton. Then he proceeds to apply his theory in the analysis of major world religions, along with a few obscure ones.

The interested reader may research Sadhu’s work (and profuse verbiage about the Radiant Macropozopos, etc.) directly. To excerpt Sadhu, the essential steps in the process for developing an egregor include:

- *Point over the Yod*: A reason for the creation of the Egregor, which must be unselfish, invariably in the broadest sense of that word. To resuscitate the idea of the double Current (involutionary and evolutionary), like the Great Ladder of Jacob, on which from the left descend the Angels (Binah) and from the right ascend the Souls (Chokmah), while at the top the Radiant Macropozopos (Kether) sits on his throne.
- *Yod*: The metaphysical essence of the Unitarian Philosophy, taken as a whole or in part. To establish the authority of Teachers, as an analogy of the remembrance about the Second Hé of the First Family (The Emperor), which mysteriously transmits the Higher Influx in the form of Emanation.
- *First Hé*: Preparation of the surroundings (environment) for attracting astrosomes, which usually finds its solution in the ethical or material difficulties of a race or nation, which lead to the realization of the necessity to improve the shape of their condition. These passive elements possess intuition as well as susceptibility to the hysteria in the extreme. To dissuade men from their proud striving to rebuild the world for their own comfort, and instead to underline the necessity of something just the opposite: of the Hermetic rebuilding of one’s own personality, so as to create, albeit dim and faded, a picture of the androgynously harmonious Logos.
- *Shin*: A decoy for those who are ready to fuse themselves with the Egregor, but who have not yet done so; also, a reserve of factual knowledge or attractive clichés, assuring the acquisition of proselytes and guarding against heresies and secessions. To purify the morale of men, in the name of the First Hé of the First Family (High Priestess), which means to compel them to understand the practice of the Commandments of the Unique Life.
- *Vau*: A good body of disciples, grouped around the Master, which can be divided into the main disciples or apostles of a doctrine (which should represent all of the four Hermetic types: Eagle / courageous thinkers, Lion / fiery knights of Kadosh, Man / logical

deliberations, and Bull / zealous workers), as well as the secondary disciples (which should also represent the active elements of the Yod above). These androgynous elements have skillful ability for the transmission of teachings and their adaptation, often with a tendency towards imposition when applying personal methods. To concern themselves with the full Reintegration of humanity, purified by the True Religion, in order to let it know the reflection of the Influx of the First Yod (Magus) and to subtilize its astral and mental planes, to realize the sephiroth of the Spouse and the Microprozopos (Tiphereth ring), and to come ultimately to the Unity of the Adam-Protoplast in the sephira Chokmah.

- Second Hé: A sound society of the followers. These realizable elements have discipline and sacrifice in the practice of the ethical rules of the doctrine.

I consider my question about the history and theory of egregors to be answered reasonably well. The term probably derived from Elizabethan era use of Greek syllabi, perhaps through Dr. Dee.<sup>15</sup>

Magical theory circa Plotinus articulated a notion of “chaining” daimonic essences into a larger construct. Contemporary theory establishes the letters of the tetragrammaton as elements of the magical operation required to create and sustain an egregor. Through these elements, one may analyze the egregoric structural dynamics of existing belief systems. The shin element of the operation seems to be a particularly subtle aspect.

Now let us consider the praxis of egregors, particularly through a common example. To that end, I would like to apply Sadhu’s analytic process to the creation of a class of organized belief systems that assert themselves quite poignantly in contemporary life: corporations.<sup>16</sup>

Arguably, these entities enjoy an ephemeral and highly symbolic existence, often claiming characteristics not unlike god-forms. To generalize a bit, corporations almost personify a stereotypical contrast between Eastern and Western approaches to philosophy. Whereas many Eastern practices tend to consider some measure of immortality as endemic for a soul, many Western practices attempt to enforce material aspects of immortality via laws.<sup>17</sup>

Corporations, as defined by the US Supreme Court, are legal or fictional individuals<sup>18</sup> that can operate on behalf of human individuals in perpetuo. They operate as the autopoietic constructs of several elemental, symbolic domains, with law being the most obvious example.<sup>19</sup>

Given the representation of the corporate form as an egregor, i.e., as a kind of god-form or daimonic essence, what aspects of magical theory need to be applied to manifest and perpetuate a corporation? Here is one analysis:

- The yod represents the “metaphysical essence” of the operation, i.e. what the alchemist is attempting to accomplish. In this case, the benefit of the shareholders would plug in here just fine.
- The first hé represents a “preparation of the surroundings”. The collective intellectual property which mediates the corporation, i.e.,

the sigil composed of a logo and trademark, is probably an excellent thing to employ for this. A corporate charter fits well, too.

- The vau represents a “good body of disciples grouped around the master”. If that does not sound like a Board of Directors, then I am ready to turn in my black robe. This quality may also extend down into the executives, employees, interns, and consultants – envision a basic organizational chart.
- The second hé represents a “sound society of followers”. This is an optimal place to link customers, the public, and mass media in general into the chain of belief.

Hermeticism tends to appreciate intentional obscurity. Stated in this context, the term “corporate veil” provides an interesting double-entendre. The means for launching an egregor into action, i.e. the way to give this tourbillon some spin, requires two additional components. First, there is a “point over the yod” which represents the “unselfish reason for creation” of the egregor. What goes here best? Perhaps the purpose of the servitor <sup>20</sup> itself? Perhaps the concept of the immortal sovereignty of the Crown who empowered corporations originally, or whatever usurps that Crown’s power?

Secondly, the shin must be inserted between the first hé and the vau. Since this represents a “decoy”, i.e., a kind of inversion of stated purpose, it would appear to serve as a reflex mechanism for self-preservation. That seems reminiscent of the dialectic of sublation, <sup>21</sup> particularly if the inversion concerns pumping stereotypical corporate spin into the media. Do advertising jingles like “People working together,” “Making the world a better place,” or “Brings good things to you” sound vaguely familiar? Can you imagine what would happen if corporate advertising ever abandoned the shin of its egregor, admitting openly that “this thing is not human, it consumes your will” instead?

Note that Sadhu also interjects <sup>22</sup> cautionary words about how an egregor might wither or die:

- Any existing or newly formed religion or spiritual current can be undermined on all of the three planes:
- On the mental plane the religion can be harmed and even destroyed by the mixing of reasoning and argumentation into its theology. This is involution in the idealistic realm of religion.
- On the astral plane the religion can be harmed by the introduction of aesthetic principles into its formal ritual. A search after the “beauty of symbols” destroys their purity. This is involution into the forms of ritual order.
- On the physical plane the religion is undermined by the addition of emotional principles into its code and commandments. Consider the (relatively short-lived) history of cults that were spoiled by emotional manifestations in religious celebrations.

Stepping back into the corporate example, those faux pas might correspond to troubles at a shareholder’s meeting, at a marketing conference, or in the process

of quarterly reporting, respectively. Guerrilla media enthusiasts, plaintiff attorneys, and grassroots political activists might do well to take careful notes about this Achilles' heel of corporate endeavor.

To conclude on a "nuts and bolts" pragmatic note, I recommend *Inside A Magical Lodge* by Greer. That text offers a balanced treatment, albeit with only a slight tilt toward the Golden Dawn. It includes reasonably good templates for how to apply operative magic involving egregors,<sup>23</sup> along with caveats for practical lodge administration. Unfortunately, Greer's meager bibliography mostly contains adverts for an aforementioned imprint with the funny crescent satellite. Fortunately, one can corroborate his references to Elizabethan esotericism in absentia within the highly recommended Cambridge work *From Paracelsus To Newton* by Webster.

So much for this subject... for the moment. I wish you well in the swirling realms of monads and gonads.

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#### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Note that this appears to be the correct spelling, according to the word's etymology. Variants such as "egregore" appear in contemporary writings, generally among those that tend to be less rigorous in substance and somewhat decorative in application - Phil Hine's work being the notable exception. Your mileage may vary.
2. In terms of autopoiesis vis-à-vis operative magic, note that Niklaus Luhmann, Gunther Teubner, and other contemporary (postmodern?) social theorists literally evoke a group zeitgeist to use for distinguishing between what they call a "psychic world" and a "social world" for any member of the group being examined. For examples, see the text of Teubner, and also his excellent London School of Economics lecture at <http://bprc.warwick.ac.uk/lseg3.html>
3. For a detailed discussion, see also the "Daniil Andreev and the Mysticism of Femininity" article by Mikhail Epstein, <http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/fi.andreev.html>
4. Flowers, pp. 116-119.
5. Crowley, chap. III: "The Formula of Tetragrammaton".
6. Flowers, pp. 49-55.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

8. Ibid., pp. 268-270.
9. As a search key, look for the (post-Judaic) transition of "YHVH" to "Joshua" via the introduction of the shin.
10. Flowers, pp. 126-127.
11. See also in Blavatsky,  
<http://www.blavatsky.net/blavatsky/arts/Tetragrammaton.htm>
12. Sadhu, pp. 246-275.
13. Translated from French, tourbillon means "whirlpool", "whirlwind", "vortex", "swirling", etc.
14. Flowers, p. 103.
15. Other trajectories point toward Agrippa in De Occulta Philosophia, related to the discussion of the corporation as servitor below and similarly to the classical operation of obtaining a paredros. A reasonable discussion of this point would require a whole other essay, which will likely follow.
16. This essay has been excerpted from a larger work entitled Corporate Metabolism that attempts to develop a qualitative model for the "biological" behavior of corporations. My work recontextualizes the development of corporate form, tracing from Elizabethan alchemists who helped create the first corporations, down through the origins of 118 U.S. 394 and into contemporary events. Versions of Corporate Metabolism have been presented at conferences and are appearing (at press time) in another journal.
17. Not to take credit for this idea, I must note that the Eastern/Western observation has been excerpted from a private dialogue with James Severson, Nov 2000.
18. The landmark US Supreme Court ruling 118 U.S. 394 of 1886 wrote an evocation formula into federal law that endowed corporations with the same rights as individuals. It effectively sublated the "states rights vs. civil rights" intent of the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution that followed the US Civil War.
19. See the text of Teubner, which references earlier works by Maturana and Varela, Luhmann, et al. Teubner's use of Talmudic text to illustrate self-referentiality seems particularly interesting given the context here of the tetragrammaton.
20. Excerpted from *Corporate Metabolism*. Use of the term servitor here refers to a group servitor working based on the alchemical praxis of "incorporation", illustrated within that text.
21. Ibid. The term sublation is a process of "overcoming", taken from Hegel's metaphysics, which arguably was developed on spec for the Prussian authorities, as commentary on the corporate economic structure of rival Britain. As such, a Hegelian dialectical analysis articulates both the modus and the "belief" rubric for corporate operations.
22. Sadhu, p. 251.
23. Greer, pp. 22-ff.

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Love is the law, love under will.