



Lure of the Arcane: The Literature of Cult and Conspiracy

By Theodore Ziolkowski

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Fascination with the arcane is a driving force in this comprehensive survey of conspiracy fiction. Theodore Ziolkowski traces the evolution of cults, orders, lodges, secret societies, and conspiracies through various literary manifestations?drama, romance, epic, novel, opera?down to the thrillers of the twenty-first century.

Lure of the Arcane considers Euripides's *Bacchae*, Andreae's *Chymical Wedding*, Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, and Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*, among other seminal works. Mimicking the genre's quest-driven narrative arc, the reader searches for the significance of conspiracy fiction and is rewarded with the author's cogent reflections in the final chapter. After much investigation, Ziolkowski reinforces Umberto Eco's notion that the most powerful secret, the magnetic center of conspiracy fiction, is in fact "a secret without content."

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Editorial Review

Review

Conspiracies, whether attributed to mystery cults, Freemasons, Socialists, or Rosicrucians, pervade literature from Euripides to Umberto Eco, as Theodore Ziolkowski shows in *Lure of the Arcane*. Ziolkowski has read everything, taking even a 3,000-page German novel in his stride, and summarizes and analyses his material fascinatingly for lesser mortals.

(*Times Literary Supplement*)

Ziolkowski is excellently placed to attempt the construction of a genre history... As such, his treatment of the literature and the array of texts included is predictably masterful, moving with ease from Greek and Roman mysteries in antiquity to the Medieval representations of the Knights Templar, through the Rosicrucian manifestoes and the German Enlightenment lodge novels, to the literary depictions of secret societies of Romantic Socialism.

(*Nova Religio*)

This is a literary and cultural history for the twenty-first century: fascinating in scope and focus, striking in its attention to detail, solid in its continuity, and indisputably erudite.

(*Choice*)

An erudite, thought-provoking argument for considering this literary engagement as a sub-genre in its own right.

(*Times Literary Supplement*)

This is an excellent book, an original and substantial contribution. I would expect it to find many readers, not just among fellow scholars. Since conspiracy, and conspiracy fiction, is a hot topic, I could imagine this book being invaluable as a guide to a university course that sought to place Umberto Eco and Dan Brown in their long-term intellectual context.

(Ritchie Robertson, St. John's College, Oxford)

Revealing, stimulating, suggestive.

(Francis Blessington, Northeastern University)

The wealth of examples, the lively and indeed intimate writing style, and the delicate refusal to go too far in the analysis of paranoid fantasies all contribute to a welcome dealing with mystery, secrecy, and the arcane.

(*Modern Philology*)

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(*Modern Philology*)

About the Author

Theodore Ziolkowski is a professor emeritus of German and comparative literature at Princeton University. He is the author of *Alchemist in Literature: From Dante to the Present*.

Users Review

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