

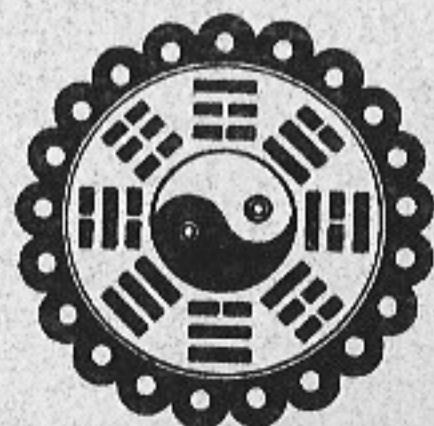
Sexual Imagery in the Early Poetry
of
ALEISTER CROWLEY
Sunny Shah





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Contra/Thought

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Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) is a cultural icon, becoming infamous for his alleged involvement in black magic and Satanism. During his lifetime, he published numerous books on magical theory, yoga, mysticism, practical ritual magic, the Jewish Kabbalah, and other esoteric subjects. He founded a religion/method based on thelema (will), which focused on practical magic (sexual and ritual) and on his holy text, *The Book of the Law*. As a man, he has been portrayed as an unsavoury character by his critics, “the black brother of God” and as a “Prophet of a New Aeon” by his followers. A continual fascination with his life and thought has produced at least ten biographies which have been published since his death. His magical works are being reprinted at a fierce rate and his scarce first editions are becoming increasingly valuable and collectable.

One neglected aspect of Crowley's life is his role as a poet—a persona long overshadowed and dominated by his occult activities and reputation. It is important to place Crowley's poetry into perspective when weighed against his other writings. Indeed, it is only necessary to look at Gerald Yorke's bibliography of Crowley's works (Mandrake Press Ltd., 1995) to see that of the one hundred items published by Crowley during his lifetime, fifty-four are poems or volumes of poetry. Yet in the emergence of a Crowley renaissance, there has been a disproportionate lack of attention paid to the aesthetic, literary side of this fascinating character. While Crowley's magical and thelemic writings were being continually reprinted during the 1950s and 1960s, the first re-issue of any volume of his poetry did not appear until 1973, with the appearance of *White Stains*, an early collection of erotic poetry.

There has been only one eclectic edition of his poetry to date, *Aleister Crowley: Selected Poems*.

It should not be surprising that detailed criticism of Aleister Crowley's poetry is virtually non-existent. There is only a handful of original book reviews and one long work, *The Star in the West*, published in 1907 (and only republished seventy years later). Even this last text is flawed, since Gerald Yorke observes that "Crowley collaborated" on it. In only one biography, *Aleister Crowley: The Man, the Mage, the Poet*, is Crowley's poetry perceived as central to his life—that is, not subordinate to his magic. Further difficulties arise when one seeks to evaluate what significance Crowley's other biographers placed on his poetical work, for as I have already mentioned, most authorities on Crowley have an impassioned concept of him, and are strongly biased for or against him. This lack of objectivity obviously colours judgement regarding his poetics. Gerald Suster, who believes Crowley to be the prophet of a new religion and who defends his life and character by constantly hagiographising him, writes: "Here it is only possible to state my opinion that Crowley is one of the greatest poets in the English language."

J.F.C. Fuller, an early disciple of Crowley and his first biographer, wrote: "On surveying the work of Aleister Crowley the two essential facts that grip our understanding are: firstly, the superabundance of his genius; and secondly, the diversity of his form."

It should, however, be noted that Fuller's commentary on Crowley's works was written as an entry into a competition Crowley instigated to popularise his poetry. It is therefore unlikely that Fuller would have written anything too damning (even though the competition form does permit adverse criticism). John Symonds, who is unsympathetic to Crowley and believes he made a religion out of his weaknesses, is less enthusiastic than Suster and Fuller—"He lacked the imagination or the maturity of mind to be a good, let alone a great, poet."

Criticism from more qualified literary sources has been equally derogatory. W.B. Yeats, who developed an essential dislike for Crowley in 1900, thought that the latter was an unspeakable fellow, but that he had written "about six lines, amid much bad rhetoric,

of real poetry." Mario Praz, in his far-reaching but flawed study of dark romanticism, *The Romantic Agony*, dismisses Crowley as a poet of any worth, relegating him to a footnote. Praz comments: "Crowley started his career by writing poems which were a slavish imitation of Swinburne and later devoted himself to the practice of black magic."

Praz's use of the sensationalist term 'black magic' to describe Crowley's esoteric philosophy demonstrates that the critic knew little of the magician's ideas directly, and that his image of Crowley was like that of so many others—dependent upon media vilification. There is merit in the idea that Crowley imitated Swinburne, and to be fair, this may be an accurate observation, an observation repeated by practically all subsequent critics of Crowley's poetry. However, I intend to argue that there is more to his poetry than mere aesthetic mimesis. This is the view taken by Martin Booth in his introduction to a selection of Crowley's poetry in which he says, "It is not easy to align the poet Aleister Crowley with any of his immediate contemporaries. Some compare him with Swinburne but this is unjustified for Swinburne was not writing in the manner or within the parameters that Crowley imposed upon himself."

Booth's lucid essay on Crowley the poet is, without doubt, the most clear and useful account of the magician's poetry that has appeared to date. This historical criticism of Crowley reveals his poetry as a product of cultural, social, and psychological factors. Viewed through this critical apparatus, Crowley's poetry becomes an unique voice in the formative years of a colourful, highly idiosyncratic iconoclast.

The present work will focus on Crowley's early poetry, primarily certain works published before 1900. This is mainly due to the fact that much of the later poetry is embroiled in the philosophy and symbolism of Thelema, a highly complex synthesis of magic, sexuality and mysticism. Unfortunately, any exegesis of his later poetry would be futile without this knowledge of thelemic philosophy.

An additional reason for concentrating on pre-1900 poetry is that it allows a view of Crowley in a creative phase set during a formative episode in his life: his initial rebellion against his strict

Plymouth Brethren Christian upbringing, his search for a replacement ideology and his first magical experiences during his Golden Dawn years. There is the distinct likelihood that Crowley's later notions on sex and magic were partially formed and expressed in these germinal works.

Crowley was a prolific poet. In 1898, he issued his first work, *Aceldama*, which he called a "philosophical poem." In the same year, he also published *The Tale of Archais*, *Jezebel*, *Songs of the Spirit*, *The Poem* and *Jephthah*. He also decided to issue some erotic verse that year, and paid Leonard Smithers, the leading pornographic publisher of the time (he issued works by Aubrey Beardsley, Max Beerbohm, Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson and Oscar Wilde among others), to print his *Green Alps*. Unfortunately, the complete sheets were destroyed by fire. Crowley salvaged some of the page-proofs, which are now preserved in the Yorke Collection of Crowley manuscripts at the Warburg Institute. It seems that Crowley was not particularly happy with this work. Across the top of one leaf of the page-proofs he has remarked: "From *Green Alps* a volume (luckily) burnt at the printers and so dropped."

He explains his relief in his autobiography: "The collection was marked by a tendency to earthly passion; and its title shows that I already regarded human love as an idea to be transcended. *Green Alps* are pleasant pastures, but I was bound for the peaks."

These peaks were perhaps crystallised in another Crowley work published clandestinely by Leonard Smithers, *White Stains*. This infamous volume has been hailed as the most disgusting piece of erotica in the English language, as being "lubricious and puerile," and even his devout followers can only muster half-hearted praise: "*White Stains* reads rather more like a collection of smutty adolescent verses with a Naughty Nineties flavour, though here and there one finds a tuneful melody and a pleasant, mild eroticism."

The printing of *White Stains* was limited to one hundred copies. Its fate was not far different from that of *Green Alps*—it was destroyed in 1924, this time deliberately, by H.M. Customs and only a handful of copies survive.

Crowley continued to publish poetry at a furious rate with volume after volume appearing. He issued so much that by 1905—

only seven years after his first volume—he was able to produce his *Collected Works* in three volumes and approaching one thousand pages. Fuller estimated that, "Aleister Crowley has written about one hundred thousand lines in the space of ten years, or half the quantity produced by Browning in fifty-six." A common complaint against Crowley as poet is that he published all his poetry, good and bad, without due regard to its quality. Cammell, who otherwise praises Crowley the poet unreservedly, believes he was wrong to publish his erotic works, "The worst about these bad things is that Crowley published them." Symonds is almost correct when he states, "In his early years, [Crowley] rushed everything round to the printer before he had time to reconsider and amend it. The result is a mass of verse, always clearly expressed (he never fell into the modern elliptical manner), but on the whole, rather wearisome to read."

While it is true that, in the early years, Crowley, who had inherited a large amount of money from his brewer father, could afford to produce lavish editions of anything and "everything" he wrote—this conception is not quite true when examined. At the Warburg there is a large body of unpublished poetry dating from the 1890s to his death which demonstrates that Crowley did not write poetry merely to publish it. His attitude toward work he was not satisfied with (such as *Green Alps*) reveals that he was occasionally prepared to censor himself (if only on aesthetic grounds). Of course, there are times when one wishes more of his poetry had been burned: *In Residence* is a collection of undergraduate poetry which he had previously published in various university journals such as *Granta*. To my ear, it reads painfully like the juvenilia it is.

Early Sexual Imagery

For Aleister Crowley, sex was of a fundamental importance. He was a voracious omnisexual, and had many partners, both male and female, during his lifetime. He was the English Head of an occult society, the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O), in which it was

alleged that sex-magic was taught in the higher grades. This sex magic was a form of westernised Tantra (loosely defined) and asserts that ritual erotic practices could effect a change in the nature and person. This intense fascination with sex and sexuality began early, and much of his nascent poetry is concerned with it. In particular, sexual deviance is celebrated in his *White Stains*, which is sometimes erotic, sometimes pornographic and sometimes brazenly crude. Criticisms have been made of this work, but it has so far escaped detailed analysis. For example, little attention has been paid to the volume's structure. *White Stains* begins mildly—it even includes a “Prefatory Sonnet to the Virgin Mary” which describes the oncoming erotica, in typical Crowley tongue-in-cheek style:

These faint songs, murmurs of a summer gale.

As the volume progresses, however, the poetry becomes increasingly sexual and increasingly graphic. Crowley collapses the standard male-female polarity and introduces elements of a variety of sexual deviation.

*To probe thy belly, and to drink
The godless fluids, and the pool
Of rank putrescence from the stool
Thy hanged corpse gave.*

The above extract is from a poem entitled “Necrophilia.” One could attribute this poetics of sexual anarchy to *fin-de-siecle* English Decadence, operating within the constraints of a fading Victorian repressed sexuality. However, Crowley's motives were more didactic, as he says:

“The facts are as follows: In the course of my reading I had come across von Kraft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. The professor tries to prove that sexual aberrations are the result of disease. I did not agree. I thought that I was able to understand the psychology involved; I thought that the acts were merely magical affirmations of perfectly intelligible points of view. I said to myself that I must

confute the professor. I could only do this by employing the one form at my disposal: the artistic form. I therefore invented a poet who went wrong, who began with normal and innocent enthusiasms, and gradually developed various vices. He ends by being stricken with diseases and madness, culminating in murder. In his poems he describes his downfall, always explaining the psychology of each act. The conclusions of the book might therefore be approved in any Sunday School.”

Thus the structure is explained. Crowley was serious when he wrote this—a sign of his integrity was that he linked *White Stains* to Kraft-Ebing more than twenty years before the above was written. An interesting observation is that, even at this early age, Crowley was identifying sex with magic. Sexual aberrations are “magical affirmations of perfectly intelligible points of view.”

It is curious that John Symonds, Crowley's chief biographer and literary executor, underwent a radical shift in his opinions towards *White Stains* between the 1950s and 1970s. His earlier view is remarkably favourable. Symonds relates, “Pornography is difficult to write well. Insincerity is, perhaps, one of its essential ingredients. As far as this line of literature is concerned, one must give *White Stains* quite a high commendation.”

Symonds wrote this in 1951, but by 1973, he had decided that “Crowley could no more transplant the Satanism of Baudelaire to England than Swinburne had done, for he entirely lacked Baudelaire's consciousness of sin and redemption.” [Interestingly, this is identical to Symonds' criticism of *Acelandama*].

I disagree with Symonds. Crowley knew sin intimately. The diversity of sexual behaviour portrayed in *White Stains* is there because it is, in society's eyes, sinful. Much of Crowley's life was spent ‘sinning’ and deliberately dancing around society's constraints. Ultimately, Crowley believed in transcending sin—collapsing virtue and vice into each other. For him, all dualities could be resolved by unification, a concept I shall return to. Hence Crowley's love of the Hermaphrodite:

You crown me king and queen: I crown thee lover!

Crowley did have a consciousness of redemption at that time, albeit an unconventional one. It was of simple, materialistic sexual union. It is certainly an un-Christian construct, but Crowley had already rejected Christianity and was desperately seeking for something to fill the resulting void (an emptiness later filled by the dogma and ritual of the Golden Dawn). A poem, "A Friend...Of Publicans and Sinners," from the unpublished *Green Alps*, demonstrates this means of salvation. The poet's soul has been denied Heaven because it is "stained with foul longings." He is approached by a womanly figure—

*And she, in woe like mine, 'Ah love, with thee
I am damned, and must here abide
Without the portal of eternal bliss.'
The light grew on us, and there came to me
The knowledge heaven was here by her sweet side
And our twain bodies were one living kiss.*

The last line particularly emphasises the redemptive glory of union.

One aspect of Crowley's sexuality that particularly inspired his early poetry was his emerging homosexuality. It may have informed his first poem, *Aceldama*. The poem has a vivid introduction wherein he describes a (fictional?) encounter with an old professor. It ends in typical Crowley ambiguity—

*I was in the death struggle with self;
God and Satan fought for my soul those three long hours.
God conquered—now I have only one doubt left—
which of the twain was God? Howbeit, I aspire!*

Another example of the poet blurring the distinctions of traditional social constructs—this time dissolving religion and ethics. A further reason why Crowley was reviled was because he was destroying these accepted symbols, or worse still, erasing the demarcation lines between allowed and disallowed, profane and sacred, society and anarchy. He was a threat to cultural security.

[For those who see the above quote as an aesthetic Satanism *à la* Baudelaire or Swinburne, it must be remembered that Crowley was at the time rebelling against a harsh Christian upbringing; it must be remembered that Crowley proceeded to create a new religion with an analogue in Priapic Satanism].

The incident Crowley raves about in the introduction has its roots in an experience he had on 31st December 1896, according to Symonds. Whereas he interprets the events of that evening as a mystical revelation, I am more inclined to accept Colin Wilson's interpretation that this was the date of Crowley's first homosexual experience. This embryonic homosexuality, coupled with Crowley's search for a new belief-system, is epitomised in stanza XXII of *Aceldama*—

*Give me a master! not some learned priest
Who by long toil and anguish has devised
A train of mysteries, but some despised
Young king of men, whose spirit is released
From all the weariness, whose lips are prized
By men not much—
Ah! let them only once grow warm, my lips to touch.*

In an early (pre-1898) unpublished sonnet, Crowley is more explicit about his first homosexual encounters,

*He who seduced me first I could not forget.
I hardly loved him, but desired to taste
A new strong sin.*

One immediately notices the word *sin*. Sexual taboos, like restraints on unreligious dogma, were shackles to be actively broken; the pleasure came as much from the crossing of the boundaries as it did from the performance of the acts themselves.

Crowley was continually negotiating his own position with respect to sexual partners. When he was in search of physical pleasure, his partners became sexual objects, similar to magical tools used in rituals. However, when he was in a more redemptive

mood, his sexual partners became vessels of salvation. [It is this latter aspect of Crowley's sexuality which enabled him to use his lovers as mediums to contact spirits and his Holy Guardian Angel, Aiwass. The former aspect of his sexuality manifests itself in the fact that Crowley died alone, being completely unable to sustain a sexual relationship]. A penetrating demonstration of this dual sexuality comes when one looks at two poems on the same subject, "A Mathilde" from *Green Alps*, and "Mathilde" from *White Stains*. Similarities run deeper than just the titles—there are resonances in certain phrases: "with strange desire grown pale" and "a cruel love" from the unpublished "A Mathilde" metamorphose into "with passion that grows pale" and "O cruel power." These links are too strong to be coincidental, and one must conclude that the two sonnets treat of the same theme. However, they are quite different in their approach to this theme. Whereas the poem from *Green Alps* reveals the redemptive, spiritual Crowley—

*I find true love where I had thought to find
A spirit to reflect my own obscene
And dead desire that scoffed at love*

—the *White Stains* poem, as is expected, is the ramification of the lustful, physical Crowley,

*O large lips opening outward like a flower
To breathe upon my face that clings to thee!
O wanton breasts that heave deliciously
And tempt my eager teeth!*

It demonstrates that although Crowley was gifted at transcending dualism, he was no stranger at creating them, especially within himself.

One final aspect of Crowley's sexual poetry must be explored briefly. It is his fusing of sexuality and death. The equating of the sexual act (particularly the moment of orgasm) with the act of dying is not a new conceit. Numerous examples abound in the literature of the Romantics and Decadents. Yet for Crowley, it

took on new meaning. Sex was a means of destroying duality for the young poet and death was another escape from the world of binary oppositions. The moment of climax became a spiritually and physically charged catharsis. Three examples from the many available will serve to illustrate this concept. The first is from an early (pre-1898) unpublished poem, "To Fur and Silk"—

*Only, my head must turn to thine,
So thou mayst drink my dying breath,
Then flood me with envenomed vine
And let thy passion be—my death.*

The second example is from "Victory", one of the longest poems in *White Stains*—

*Suck deep the poison. Now I wis
The sweet pollution of thy breath
Was never so divine! Thy kiss!
Ah, sweet Lord Christ! So sweet as this!
Ah, Christ! Together! Passion! Death!*

Regrettably, Crowley does not always know when to restrain himself, and the sex-death principle is made graphically literal in "Necrophilia."

*.....The rod
Gains new desire; dive, howl, cling, suck,
Rave, shriek, and chew; excite the fuck,
Hold me, I come! I'm dead! My God!*

Crowley was ever an eclectic experimenter in all things different. The quote shows how he was prepared to prostitute his spiritual identifications in moments of sheer physical lust. Sex and sexuality may have been the key to redemption, magic and unification but Crowley never forgot that it was also a means of pure physical satisfaction. Crowley, who was said to have regularly used morphine,

opium, chloroform, hashish, cocaine and heroin, appears to have seen sex as one more drug.

Yoga is the art of unifying oneself with God. There are various ways of achieving this—through sex (Tantra), through meditation and ego-loss and, for Crowley, through poetry. In the last book he published, *Olla*, he returned to poetry after many years exploring other paths to Godhood—

"My object is to proclaim the duty of every poet; and this is:—to reveal the Godhead in every man and woman through the expression of each one's rapture at the ecstatic moment of Union with that Godhead; thereby to show as just and perfect every soul that is."

Union, whether sexual, mystical or spiritual, was one of Crowley's most recurrent images. The resolving of dualities and ultimate identification with an inner God was not a later development for Crowley. Fifty years before the above quote was penned, Crowley was saying the same thing in verse—

*...And the dual self
Of love grew less distinct and I began
To feel her heart in mine, her lips in mine...
Then mistier grew the sense of God without,
And God and I, and nothing might exist,
Subsist, or be at all, outside of Me,
Myself Existence of Existences.*

Crowley was not attempting to impose an egocentrism upon reality. Rather, he was envisioning a world where the distinctions between one person and another were not precise. Certainly he had in mind the blurring of opposites that sex provides, but he also had a concept of spiritual unity, transcending all differences—

*The Universe is One; One Soul, One Spirit,
One Flame, One infinite God, One infinite Love.*

Here, he is anticipating the Gaia hypothesis that currently holds favour with certain scientists and holistic New Age groups. It is, of course, wonderfully ironic that in the last-cited poem, the woman he is with is technically a harlot.

For Crowley, unification was also ideological. He could bring together concepts from diverse schools of thought and synthesise a new philosophy. However, this skill was met with unease by the general public. His wanton appropriation of cultural symbols from various sources was a threat to those who felt an invasion of their sacred, traditional ideological space. G.K. Chesterton was such a one who was nervous of Crowley's eclecticism.

In a review of one of Crowley's early volumes of poetry, *The Soul of Osiris*, he wrote, "The notion that a turban and a few vows will make an Englishman a Hindu is quite on par with the idea that a black hat and an Oxford degree will make a Hindu an Englishman...Mr. Crowley is a strong and genuine poet, and we have little doubt that he will work up from his appreciation of the Temple of Osiris to that loftier and wider work of the human imagination, the appreciation of the Brixton Chapel."

Certainly, Crowley could be a despicable fellow at times, but the national media vilification of him may have had its roots in a collective English fear of losing the Empire and ultimately, of society's loss of control of the individual. Crowley was a scapegoat, a cultural Other. Poetically, he was also a neophile, far ahead of his times. He wrote in a rhetorical, stylised, and often flowery manner best befitting the poets of the 1890s, and yet he looked forward to the twentieth century in that he tackled themes and concepts that were yet to become common poetic currency.

Aleister Crowley will not be remembered as a great poet. Certainly, he was apt at handling rhyme and metre, but he was no poetic innovator. Occasionally, he would deliberately distort the metre of a poem for dramatic effect, but this hardly made him live up to the picture Fuller gave of him, "A poetic iconoclast to the very backbone, we find Crowley, especially in his later works, breaking away from every poetic convention and restraint."

This brief look into Crowley's early poetry has made no particular mention of his style. This is because his form is far less interesting

than his content. If one desired to make some cursory comments, then it would be fair to say that he wrote typically for the 1890s in the Decadent style. He had a penchant for alliteration and lyrical simplicity. His poetry was often musical. Granted, he imitated Swinburne, Browning and Baudelaire, but these were not his main literary sources. During his childhood, he was forbidden to read most books, and was allowed to study one text only, the Bible. It would be far more fruitful to consider Crowley stylistically with respect to this source.

It was C.R. Cammell who believed that Crowley was a great poet who was hindered by his other activities. Cammell writes, "Poets there are among his contemporaries who have composed verses as beautiful as Crowley's best but no other poet in our time has conquered thus mightily so vast a realm of poetic theme and meditation. Sweep away the dross; destroy the venomous growths of his mighty, but unbalanced brain; there will remain about his tomb a forest of laurel."

However, for Crowley, poetry and magic were not to be divorced. [For a brief exploration of Crowley's complex fusing of magic and poetry, see Appendix A]. They existed in symbiosis. Nevertheless, poetry could not fulfil all his needs. Crowley had to have an overt relationship with his society, one which he continually renegotiated. In the early years, this relationship was mediated by his poetry. Later, it would be through his magic. Yet Crowley's magic was based around *The Book of the Law*, a powerful and poetic text. Magic and poetry are not so disparate, it seems.

What motivated Crowley? Crowley himself seems to indicate that oppression drove him to poetry and other vices. He confesses, "The problem of life was not how to satanise, as Huysmans would have called it; it was simply to escape from the oppressors and to enjoy the world without any interference of spiritual life of any sort...So far as I indulged in daydreams, they were exclusively of a normal sexual type. There was no need to create phantasms of a perverse or unrealisable satisfaction. It is important to emphasise this point, because I have always appeared to my contemporaries as a very extraordinary individual obsessed by fantastic passions. But such were not in any way natural to me. The moment the

pressure was relieved every touch of the abnormal was shed off instantly. The impulse to write poetry disappeared almost completely at such periods."

Some, like Regardie, take a Freudian interpretation of Crowley, and believe he had incestuous feelings towards his mother and wanted to violate her. Colin Wilson rejects this "unnecessarily Freudian interpretation of Crowley's perfectly straightforward sexual obsession." However, there is an unpublished poem at the Warburg, "Mother Love," which describes in graphic detail this very same forbidden consummation that Wilson rejects. Crowley's early poetry was that of unification: was this the union he unconsciously sought? Whatever the true motivations for Crowley the poet, a major study of Crowley's poetry, from all periods of his life, is long overdue. Crowley will never be accorded one of the Greats, but an understanding of his poetry may place his extraordinary life into a clearer perspective.

Appendix A

Linking Crowley's Poetry and Magic

The relationship between Crowley's poetry and his magic is complex. Since he is a relatively obscure poet, this appendix has been written to demonstrate the difficulties that arise when one considers the genres Crowley was working within.

Several attempts have been made to classify Crowley's poetry generically. Booth's division is fourfold, and it is, perhaps, the one perception which is flawed in an otherwise excellent overview. To his credit, however, he is very hesitant and vague in his classification, and sticks to general open terms. It is as if he was himself reluctant to produce any model, or was forced to categorise on the demands of an editor. I quote Booth from his introductory essay—"Broadly speaking, [Crowley's] poetry fits into four loose categories. Firstly, there is the poetry of place and action or reaction, written as a result of Crowley's response to a place or event...The second grouping is the poetry of love: with Crowley, this is often mingled with his magical writings, but from a poetic point of view, it is easiest to see it as a separate entity. Thirdly comes his occult poetry, written either as prayers or as incantations, or as hymns or poems derived from magical experiences. Finally, there are what must be classed as ephemeral poems in which Crowley gives full reign to his self-indulgence, his pomposity and his simplistic arrogance. Inevitably, some of the poems cross the boundaries from one division to another."

Booth admits that the definitions are not rigid. However, the classifications he makes omit certain poems altogether. There is no mention of his sexual-magical writings, which are certainly not love-poems, nor simply occult verses. Narrative poetic sequences such as *The Tale of Archais* and *The Mother's Tragedy*, do not fall into any of the proposed categories. Crowley's mystical poetry, a genre as distinct from occultism as romance is from erotica, is also not allowed for in the framework of Booth's system. Some critics

prefer to opt for a simpler division of Crowley's poetry. For example, *Leah Sublime* is a work of explicit sexuality and coprophagia and has been called "the very opposite of sublime" by Symonds. It is Suster who again defends Crowley. He writes of *Leah Sublime*—"This extraordinary poem has been condemned as merely an exercise in obscenity by the dull and dirty-minded, but it is in fact a Tantra and a holy work. Here, like Rabelais, in a glorious act of poetic alchemy Crowley suggests the highest conceptions by using the gross as vehicle. [Tantra is a school of yoga which teaches that union with Godhead can be attained through sexual acts on earth. Crowley was one of the first to bring Tantra to the eyes of the Western world.]" So, is *Leah Sublime* a magical poem or not? The answer will be subjective, modulated by personal beliefs.

Another critique of the twofold classification of Crowley's poetry comes from the poet himself. In accordance with his ideology of thelema, "Every intentional act is a Magical Act." This is developed further in the realm of poetry, "Since 'Every man and every woman is a star,' each of us is, or makes, his own poem." This was true for Crowley, at least. His autobiography, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, was not divided into chapters but into stanzas. And every chapter heading was followed by extracts of facsimile manuscript poetry (these details are sadly missing from all subsequent editions of his "autohagiography").

Basically, Crowley believed poetry to be, by its very nature, magical. Non-magical poetry would be a contradiction in terms, oxymoronic. I personally believe that definitive classification is quite unnecessary. Crowley was a magician and a poet. His poetry is thus magical. (And his magic is poetical?) The only disputable distinction between poems now is the level of magic each one contains. It is not a perfect system, and will not stop arguments between die-hard enemies (such as Symonds and Suster), but at least it groups all his poetry under one label. The poetry of Aleister Crowley can conceivably be defined by only one generic term: Crowleysque.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography will be split into four sections:

1. The Yorke Collection at the Warburg Institute
2. Primary
3. Biographical and Critical
4. Comparative Literature

1. The Yorke Collection at the Warburg Institute

Gerald Yorke, a close friend of Crowley, vowed that he would preserve every item of Crowley memorabilia possible. Over the years, he built up an extensive collection of diaries, letters, ephemera and unpublished manuscripts, including much poetry which has never been issued. He generously deposited the collection at the Warburg Institute, University of London. To this has recently been added (in 1984) a large volume of manuscripts relating to the Golden Dawn and its members—this comprises the New Yorke Collection. All the following items are from the original collection, with Gerald Yorke's original catalogue references, which the Institute has maintained.

1. C4 - Manuscript holography poetry [A large folder of manuscript poetry. Primarily in Crowley's hand, but some poems are in the hand of Norman Mudd, one of his disciples. Many unpublished poems. Unbound.]
2. N1 - Typescript poetry [Very large collection of typescript poetry. Many poems typed-up from manuscript sources at the instigation of Gerald Yorke. Many unpublished poems.]
3. D6 - Holograph letters 1899 - 1906 [Large folio scrapbook of c. forty letters written by Crowley from 1899 - 1906. Most of the letters are to his friend, Gerald Kelly.]
4. E21 - Letters to Aleister Crowley [Collection of letters to Aleister Crowley, and his friends, from relatively famous people, such as Bertrand Russell and Montague Summers.]
5. G1 - *Green Alps* page proofs [Page proofs of dedicatory poem

and pp. 81-107 of this never-published volume of early poetry. Contains manuscript corrections by Crowley and printer's directions in the hand of Leonard Smithers, the publisher of the work. Unbound. 1898]

6. G2 - *Songs of the Spirit* - Galley page proofs [Galleys for work published in 1898. Manuscript corrections in Crowley's hand. Bound for him in full morocco.] *
7. G4 - *The Giant's Thumb* - page proofs [Only surviving copy of this volume of poetry written in 1915. Issued for the first time in a trade paper edition and a limited edition of 50 copies in quarter leather and boards, 1992 by First Impressions.] *
8. G5 - *White Stains* - Galley page proofs [Galleys for work published anonymously in 1898. Contains manuscript corrections by Aleister Crowley. Bound for him in full morocco.]

2. Primary

All titles in this section are by Crowley. Arranged chronologically.

1. *The Tale of Archais* (London, 1898)
2. *Songs of the Spirit* (London, 1898) *
3. *White Stains* (Amsterdam, 1898)
4. *Jephthah and Other Mysteries* (London, 1899)
5. *An Appeal to the American Republic* (London, 1899) and re-issued by Mandrake Press Ltd. of Thame in 1995. *
6. *The Soul of Osiris* (London, 1901) *
7. *In Residence* (Cambridge, 1904) *
8. *Collected Works*. 3 vols (Foyers, 1905-07)
9. *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*. 2 Vols (London, 1930)
10. *Olla* (London, 1946) *
11. *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley* ed. Grant & Symonds (New York, 1970)
12. *White Stains*. (ed.) Symonds (London, 1973)
13. *Aleister Crowley: Selected Poems* (Wellingborough, 1986)

*All of these titles are available from First Impressions through the Holmes Publishing Group or Mandrake Press Ltd. in the UK.

3. Biographical and Critical

Arranged Alphabetically

1. Cammell, C.R. *Aleister Crowley: The Man: The Mage: The Poet* (London, 1951)
2. Fuller, Capt. J.F.C. *The Star in the West* (London and New York, 1907)
3. Praz, Mario. *The Romantic Agony* (London, 1933)
4. Regardie, Israel. *The Eye in the Triangle* (New York, 1982)
5. Stephenson, P.R. *The Legend of Aleister Crowley* (London, 1930)
6. Suster, Gerald. *The Legacy of the Beast* (London, 1988)
7. Symonds, John. *The Great Beast* (London, 1951)
8. Symonds, John. *The Great Beast* (revised edition—London, 1971)
9. Symonds, John. *The King of the Shadow Realm* (London, 1989)
10. Wilson, Colin. *Aleister Crowley: The Nature of the Beast* (Wellingborough, 1987)

4. Comparative Literature

1. Baudelaire, Charles. *The Complete Verse* (London, 1986)
2. Swinburne, Algernon Charles Swinburne. *Selected Poems* (Manchester, 1982)

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